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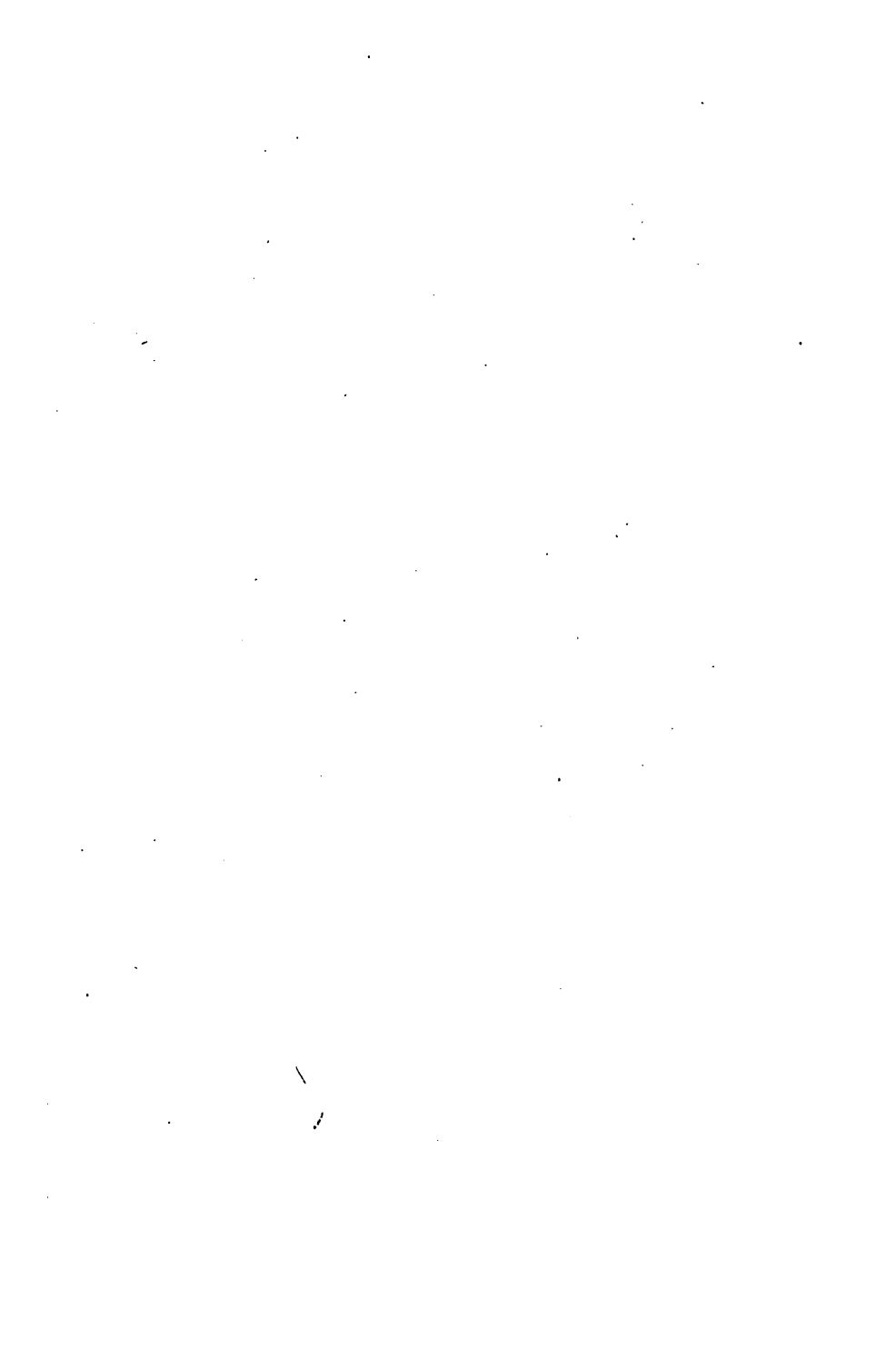
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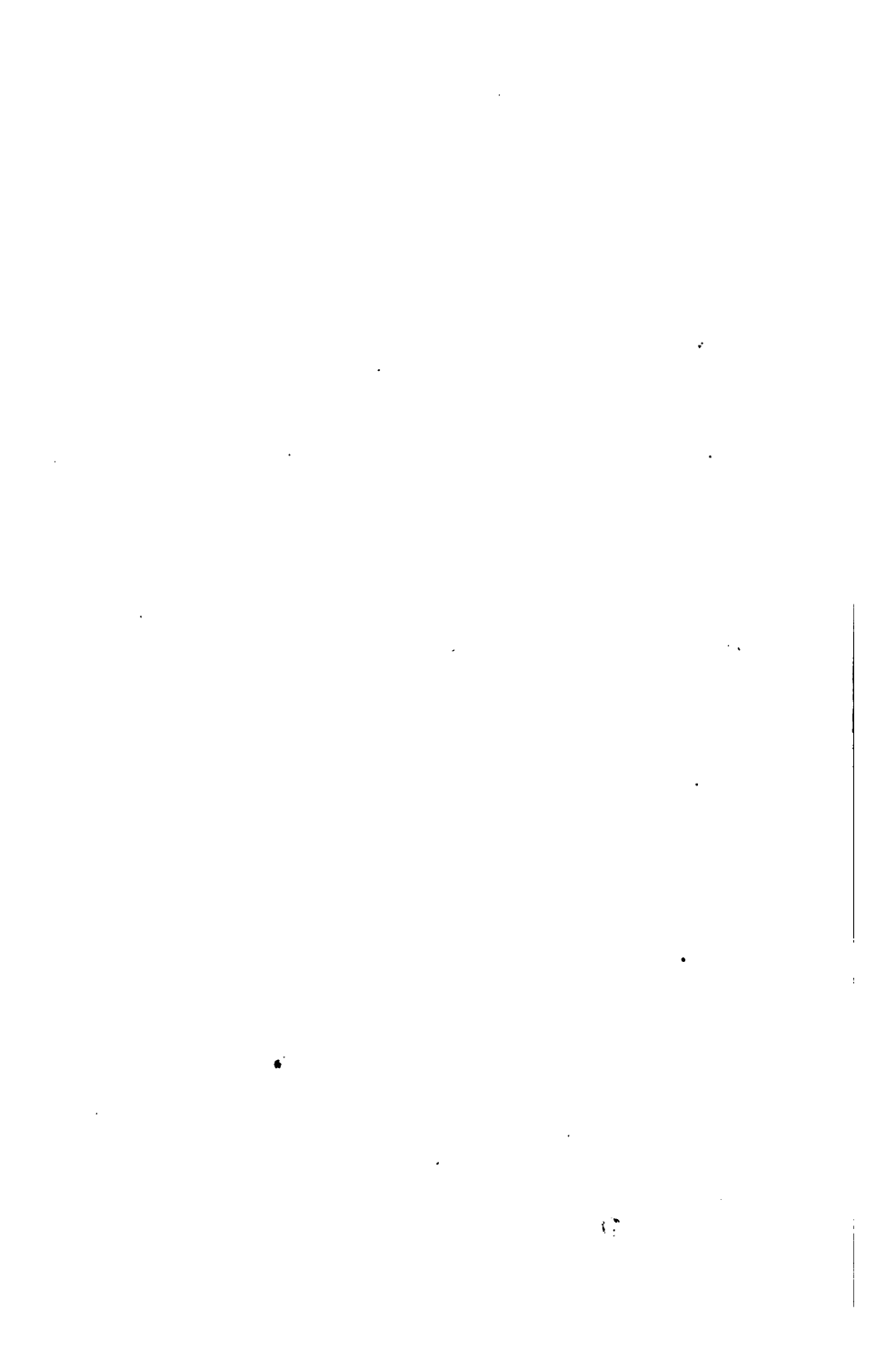
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VICTOR AND VANQUISHED.

VOL. II.



VICTOR AND VANQUISHED.

BY

MARY CECIL HAY,

AUTHOR OF

“HIDDEN PERILS,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1874.

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251. b. 12.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL,
BLENHEIM HOUSE.

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VICTOR AND VANQUISHED.

CHAPTER I.

WHERE THE LETTER WENT.

MR. JOHNSON MATHERS, stationer and postmaster of Churchill, sat writing at his desk, on the afternoon succeeding Lina Chester's night walk to the village post-office. It was by no means an unusual thing for Mr. Mathers to be seated at his desk, but it *was* an unusual thing for him to be entering three new books to the account of Miss Marjorie Castil-lain, of Hawkedale.

“The old gentleman doesn't allow her more than just what she's bound to spend on her dress.” So said Churchill, and the *vox populi* was never nearer the truth.

"It is odd," ruminated Mr. Mathers, "that I should have chanced to lay those very books out on the counter before she came in that day, and that she should have remembered afterwards that they were the books she wanted. It was a good chance hit of mine." And Mr. Mathers finished entering the order with complacency, knowing, of course, nothing about Marjorie's motives, or of how she had had to ransack her brain to recollect what books they were which she had noticed in the shop.

Mr. Johnson Mathers looked up from his desk as a lady came through the open glass door, then acknowledged the presence of Miss Marjorie Castillain with a bow.

The postmaster of Churchill was no sycophant, but with this little bow of his he always distinguished his county customers from those whom he could freely designate (as he often did in his letters to the local paper) as his "fellow-townsmen." He was a man who had read a good deal, and thought a good deal, and upon that basis formed very Radical opinions. Yet,

for all that, he was never known to omit the deferential bow which he specially awarded to his county patrons.

"Your parcel, Miss Castillain, will be sent up at once—to High Athelston, I presume?"

"No," said Marjorie, a little perceptible hesitation in her pleasant voice, "I think I should like it sent home. We shall soon be returning to Hawkedale. But I did not come in now about that; I knew that would be all right. The fact is, I have just made a great mistake, and I want you to assist me in rectifying it."

Mr. Johnson Mather's spirits rose a little. Here was the nicest young lady in the county, come to him for assistance, and *she* could never ask him anything to which it would be against his principles to agree.

"I posted a letter in this office an hour ago, which I want to stop," said Marjorie, hastening on with her words. "The fact is, circumstances have arisen, since then, to make it of the utmost importance to me that the letter should not

go. Mr. Mathers, will you give it back to me?"

Poor Marjorie! She thought that when once she had uttered the falsehood and the request, her greatest difficulty would be over. Surely the postmaster, though he might suspect her, would give her the letter. But she was to be grievously disappointed; the longing brown eyes read a calm and determined negative in his face.

"I am very sorry, Miss Castillain," he said, and there was a real regret in his tones, "but such a thing is impossible. I cannot return a letter that has once been posted. I dare not, however much I might wish it."

"Dare not?" echoed Marjorie, in her ignorance. "Oh! but it's my own letter, and I want it back. No one else will know—no one else shall *ever* know—so no one can blame you for it."

"But you do not understand, Miss Castillain," returned the postmaster. "I am bound by an oath in my position here. I should be glad to do it for *you*, if I could do it for anyone."

“But surely you could do that,” pleaded Miss Castillain, with an earnestness which the Church-hill postmaster had never seen before in her merry eyes. “Just think what a little thing it is that I ask! Circumstances have arisen which make the posting of that letter a great mistake; and why may I not stop it, and prevent this mistake, which cannot be corrected afterwards, try as we may? Suppose I had burnt it when I had first written it; no one would have done wrong, no one would have been to blame. Now, just because I—I have slipped it into your letter-box, is it to be as entirely out of my reach as if it had never been mine? Does that make it a crime for me to retain it? Do give me the letter, Mr. Mathers!” the girl broke off, with quick entreaty.

“There are other ways of looking at the case, Miss Castillain,” the postmaster said, very regretfully, but still with the quiet determination which said so much for the impracticability of the thing. “As I said, I am bound by an oath, and I cannot do this if I would. But for that, indeed, I would. You should not

have to ask me twice. As it is, I cannot."

Looking into Miss Castillain's wistful eyes, Mr. Johnson Mathers saw them slowly fill with tears, which, without falling, clung to the long, dark lashes. Not only had he never seen them so before,—few ever had,—but he had not even imagined that the laughing eyes, which were so well known in Churchill, could soften with wistful, disappointed tears. He looked sideways out of his window. Strong and firm as his principles were, he felt it wiser not to meet those puzzled, persuasive eyes.

"Mr. Mathers, I think even the Postmaster-General would not object to my having my letter back," she said, gently. "He couldn't, if he knew how much depended on it."

"I wish he had the question asked him instead of myself," was the somewhat unsteady answer, as Johnson Mathers still looked from the window, and wondered why his heart should beat so much more quickly when he tried to fancy what this girl's gratitude would be like.

"He would consent, I'm sure," she put in,

with anxious haste. "I will ask him some time if he could refuse—for I know him well, Or," she corrected herself, in her nervous anxiety, "or I will never speak of it. If you will do it, I will never tell."

"But that makes no difference, indeed, Miss Castillain," Mr. Mathers answered, turning with an effort once more to meet the pleading gaze. "I cannot break my oath."

"Is there no way?" asked Marjorie, after a long, thoughtful pause. "Is there no way in which you can kindly oblige me?"

The postmaster folded the blotting-paper that lay on the counter, slowly and deliberately, his eyes fixed upon it; partly because to look up shattered his strong and steadfast resolution, partly because the thought he followed was engrossing him. When he did look up at last, Miss Castillain saw a change in his whole face; and she fancied then that, in spite of his apparent immovability, he had been really hurt to refuse her.

"Miss Castillain, to whom is your letter addressed?"

The answer came from her lips in a whisper, as if she feared that the very books had ears to hear.

"To Mrs. M'Mullen, 18, Berkeley Square, London, W."

"And you wish that it should not reach London?"

"I do indeed. I am very anxious."

The brilliant eyes, in their sudden flash of hope, were not hard to meet now. Mr. Mathers thought, with his quiet smile, that it was very pleasant to feel them fixed upon himself.

"You wish to keep the letter in your own possession, Miss Castillain?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then I will do what shall insure its reaching your hands, and afterwards you can treat it as you will. I hope no one else will ever make this request to me, but I will do it now. Will you address this envelope to yourself, while I look for the letter? 'Mrs. M'Mullen, 18, Berkeley Square.'"

As he repeated the address, he placed a large-sized envelope on the blotting-paper before

Marjorie, and passed her the pen and ink. Just as she was writing her own name (and Mr. Mathers, beyond the opposite counter, was opening the letter-box), a gay, talkative party entered the shop. Marjorie heard the steps behind her, and coolly placed the blotting-paper over the envelope, rising slowly from her chair, and addressing the Rector of Churchill in just as cool and gay a tone as if her heart had not been beating heavily with fear.

With the Rector came his daughter, and Eustace Jelfrey, with little Jack Esdaile. Marjorie turned and spoke, and shook hands with each, though she would not stir from that spot, nor remove her one hand from the blotting-paper. By the time Mr. Jorden needed the services of the master of the shop, those services were at his disposal. Mr. Mathers was as far as possible from the letter-box, coolly packing the books for Miss Castillain.

"Are you coming our way, Miss Marjorie?" asked the Rector, when their business was over, while Jelfrey awaited her answer with subdued eagerness.

"Not yet, Mr. Jorden. I have promised to wait here until the carriage passes to High Athelston. I had two or three errands to do in the town, but I cannot walk any farther. I am quite tired now."

"You are still staying at High Athelston?" inquired Mr. Jorden.

"Yes. We shall be there a few days longer. So you did return to your duties this morning, Mr. Jelfrey, after all?"

Bright and quizzical was her glance at Jelfrey; and he answered gaily, knowing so little what had brought her there.

"I felt that my leave had expired. I would not on any account abuse Mrs. Esdaile's lenity, though Sir Neil Athelston was good enough to persuade me (and Colonel Stuart seconded him) to stay as long as his other guests."

"Sir Neil is always hospitable," remarked Marjorie, lightly. "Good-bye, Emily. I'm sorry I cannot walk with you."

But Emily Jorden was not sorry at all, and Marjorie smiled as she read this fact, and

watched Miss Jorden walking away gladly at Eustace Jelfrey's side.

"Now," said Marjorie to herself, drawing a great breath of relief when they were gone, "now it will be all right."

When she turned in from the door, the post-master had gone again to the letter-box. Though he was only a small shopkeeper in a small town, he was too courteous to be standing near her, after having overheard the excuses she had uttered. She finished the address on the envelope, writing with intense care, in fine, pointed letters, exactly as her sister would have done.

"Is this it, Miss Castillain?" asked Mr. Mathers, holding Louisa's letter towards her, and critically comparing the handwriting of the two addresses.

"That is it," she answered, with a catch in her voice, as she saw him examine the writing.

He put the letter, without another word, into the large envelope she had addressed to herself; then he stamped it, and replaced it in the letter-box.

"Now, Miss Castillain," he said, evidently glad to have pleased her, yet as evidently not quite free from self-blame, "you will receive that letter by to-morrow morning's post, and will, of course, do what you like with it. I have not let it out of my hands, but I am glad to say I have been able to accommodate you. Your parcel shall be sent up at once," he added, with quick tact, "for I see the boy now coming down the street."

But though he had said this to set her at her ease, he knew that he would not for anything have missed her few earnest words of thanks. The boy came in, and was despatched at once (and rather demonstratively) to Hawkedale, with Miss Castillain's books; and Miss Castillain herself sauntered to the door, and gazed down the steep street. But she had done this several times before she saw the beautiful bays, in their dazzling harness, trotting in from High Athelston; Neil himself driving them, and Ridley, with folded arms, beside him.

Mr. Mathers came out to assist Miss Castillain to her seat, and she thanked him with one of

her bright, quick smiles. But Colonel Stuart had left his place at the back of the long, luxurious waggonette, and there was no need of other help for Marjorie. Ridley closed the door behind them; Louisa significantly moved aside her dress to let her sister pass; Neil looked round from his high seat and asked, "All right?" Marjorie nodded up at him from the seat which she had been forced to take, and then the bays went stepping on daintily, up the street and out into the London road.

"What an odd coincidence!" ruminated Mr. Johnson Mathers, as he turned back into his shop. "I'm glad to have been able to do it for her in some sort of manner, but I don't suppose there's anyone else in the county for whom I could have done it. And that's not because she's going to be Lady Athelston of High Athelston, for it's not for my lady or Sir Neil that I would have done what I've done to-day. And she wasn't ashamed of thanking me there before them all, just as she would have thanked any one of them. She's always that way. If she had been so only just because I had done

what she asked me to do, I'd not have thought of it one second, or valued it one grain; but she's always so; being, I take it, a lady in her heart, apart from her money and her position, and all that. She little thinks how that kindness and pleasantness which come natural to her have returned to her to-day in this favour which she begged of me. I'm glad," continued the postmaster, philosophically, "that she does *not* know. It comes straight from the goodness of her heart, and it's pleasant to think she imagines that whatever we do for her comes straight from the goodness of *ours*."

Next morning, with very skilful haste, Marjorie put into her pocket unopened the one letter which the High Athelston post-bag contained for her, and after breakfast started alone across the park. She had promised to meet Lina Chester near the cottages in Nether Lane, but, before she reached them, Eustace Jelfrey, riding with his pupil, overtook her.

"Is not this a beautiful Autumn day, Miss Marjorie?" he said, dismounting with prompt

courtesy, and speaking in his softest tones, as he walked on beside her.

"Why, Jack," she exclaimed, only acknowledging Mr. Jelfrey's greeting with a cold smile, "you have perpetual holidays, I think! Where are you going now?"

"Home—to lessons, unfortunately," answered the boy. "Come with us, Marjorie, and make them jolly."

"They will be sure to be jolly, in any case, Jack," she said, with a side-glance at the tutor, "how many hours have you studied already to-day?"

"Oh, two or three; quite enough, I think, for the whole day; but Mr. Jelfrey is so dreadfully strict about study when he is at it."

"Quite natural too," assented Marjorie, "seeing how very often he is *not* at it."

"Those holidays which the boy enjoys so much," said Jelfrey, in a low, plausible tone, "are valueless to me, Miss Castillain. The only thing that could make leisure enjoyable for me no leisure gives me."

"Do you not enjoy any of the occupations of

your leisure time?" asked Marjorie, looking fully and calmly into his face; "not even those occupations which make your leisure so fortunate for others?"

"I do not understand you," said Jelfrey, his voice quite calm, though the scarlet mounted slowly to his very hair.

"I think you do," she returned, in the slow, grave voice which always baffled him, because he never understood whether it was fun or sarcasm, "I think you do. Jack," she continued, turning gaily to the boy, and laying her hand on his pony's neck, "ride on now, fast. I want to come slowly, and enjoy to the very fullest the beauty of this wonderful day. Good-bye."

And when she had succeeded in dismissing them, Marjorie laughed low and clearly, as she lingered behind among the flickering sunbeams and soothing shadows, a great enjoyment shining in the depths of her bright eyes.

"Discomfited!" she said to herself, merrily, "decidedly discomfited; and such a result is worthy my greatest efforts."

Then Marjorie, still with the laughter on her

lips and in her eyes, sat down upon the hedge-bank and waited for Lina, while the brown leaves fell upon her from the elms above.

When Lina came into sight, Miss Castillain rose at once and joined her, talking bright little commonplaces as they walked on together under the Autumn trees.

“Lina,” she said, easily and coolly, as they came in sight of the two white cottages, “I have the letter for you. Here it is. I have had no trouble about it—don’t imagine that I have. It was all quite easy, and so you need not ask me anything about it, for it is not worth telling of.”

Not only did Marjorie, in her simple, deep generosity, make thus light of her own act, but so amusedly, yet so gently, did she receive Lina’s broken thanks, that somehow it ended for them both in a cheery little laugh. Yet for all that, Marjorie’s trusting confidence in acting thus, and her bright delicate tact in treating her own part so lightly and Lina’s part so openly, went deep down into the heart of the lonely girl, and stirred its very depths with a grati-

tude which nothing had ever roused before through all her life.

"You are going in to speak to Mr. Spendir, aren't you?" inquired Miss Castillain, as she hesitated at the gate of Mrs. Cheere's cottage. "How long do you think you shall be? I will time my visit to Dorcas accordingly; we may just as well walk back together as separately; mayn't we?"

"I shall only be a few minutes, Miss Castillain," answered Lina, nervously, knowing that Marjorie had decided to call upon Dorcas only to make her feel at liberty to go next door, and really almost bewildered in her gratitude.

"I need not stay longer than half an hour," said Miss Castillain. "If that will suit you, you will be here again in that time?"

"Yes; thank you."

Marjorie smiled at the thanks, but her face was sad and pitiful, too, when she entered Mrs. Cheere's neat and stiff little parlour.

A very dull call it was, accompanied by complaints in every key; and it was more in the hope of a change, than from any desire to obtain

information, that Marjorie turned the conversation at last to the artist and his boy.

"I don't understand anything about their goings on," remarked Dorcas, her head at a stately elevation. "They seem to be as poor as they can be, and yet, all the time, they sing as if the world was their own."

"Do they?" asked Marjorie, absently, wondering whether the grievance to Dorcas was their poverty, or their singing in defiance of it.

"Do they? Indeed they do," she echoed, with scornful emphasis; "and when they are not singing they are up to other spurtlements—laughing, or playing games, or whatever they call it."

"What should you call it, Mrs. Cheere?" inquired the girl, deferentially, hoping her question would elicit another unusual term.

"I call it disturbing a peaceable neighbour," retorted Dorcas; "that's what I call it, Miss Castillain. I know I and my little girl never made such noises, and there never are such noises in my house."

"Are they never still, then, next door?"

"Hardly to say ever quite still," explained Dorcas. "If the father's working, the child's reading aloud by the hour, or telling him stories, or playing fiddles; or they're both whistling, or—oh, it's always something or other, and then they have such odd visitors."

"Have they? And no visitors that are not odd?" asked Marjorie, an inexplicable blush rising as she spoke.

"Too many, I should think, considering what a barn it is to ask respectable people into," answered Dorcas, with a relish. "There's the Colonel comes often and often, and stays long enough too, I should think, when there isn't a comfortable chair, so to be called, in the place."

"Yes?" questioned Marjorie, rousing herself, after the pause which followed Mrs Cheere's words.

"Oh, plenty more, Miss Castillain, though I can't be expected to say what sort. Lady Athelston's companion, as they call her—though I wonder my lady likes to be a companion of *hers*—she comes now and then in a sly dark way. I can't bear to see it—I, a respectable

woman! If I'd thought my little girl would do such a thing——"

"As call to see Mr. Spendir in the dusk, you mean?" asked Marjorie, gently, as the woman paused to wipe her eyes.

"I don't like her," put in Dorcas, with unexpected vigour; "I never liked her. She always looked too ladyfied for her place. But I've liked her less since I've seen her come to speak to that man next door," (it was rarely that Dorcas condescended to give the artist any other designation), "when quiet, orderly folks were in their own rooms."

"I would do it any day, Mrs. Cheere, and never think harm of it, either," put in Marjorie, audaciously. "Does he have other visitors, did you say?"

"I've seen the tutor from the Anchorage go in at the gate," rejoined Dorcas, rather stonily; "and he's been sitting in here before now, waiting for the man to come in."

"In here?" ejaculated Miss Castillain, now really astonished.

"Yes, in here, Miss Castillain; rather pleasant-

er, I should think, it was for him, too, than in that place. Thank goodness, I *have* got chairs that I can ask you and him and such like to sit on, without feeling ashamed of myself."

"I hear Miss Chester's voice now, I think," said Marjorie, gently, as she rose. "She has been in next door, and I should like to catch her, that we may walk home together. Good-bye. You will see me to-morrow with the paper."

Hardly could Dorcas articulate her good-bye, so surprised and puzzled was she by the fact of Miss Castillain not only countenancing the visits of Lady Athelston's companion to that man next door, but actually joining her afterwards, anxious to walk back with her.

Standing at the window, but out of sight, Dorcas gazed eagerly upon the meeting of the two girls; and her breath quickened to a dangerous degree when she saw that "that man" was there too, and that Miss Castillain's first act, when she joined them, was to give him her hand with a smile, which made her look beautiful even to the gloomy, prejudiced eyes of

the solitary and embittered woman who looked surreptitiously on the scene.

"Mr. Spen-dir," Marjorie said, feeling the colour rise and the tears start as she met the look of strange, quiet earnestness which beautified the artist's face while he stood out there in the sunshine, "I've had my usual shindy with Dorcas—I mean I've had an engagement with Dorcas, as usual. I cannot think how you escape. I thought everybody who came near her had to join in a continual skirmish. And I understand that you always get the worst of it, unless you show an enormous amount of pluck—I mean a great amount of energy; and defy her—defy her to the death! I hope you do that?"

"*You* do not, Miss Castillain," Fitz said, not understanding that her speech was uttered only as a hint to him that he must do so if he wanted any peace.

"Oh, I do," laughed Marjorie, "only I like first to listen to her. She teaches me one or two new words every time I hear her. It's as good as a play. Isn't it what King Charles said

of Parliament discussing the Divorce Bill? Now, Lina, shall we walk back together?"

"I am ready," said Lina, looking brighter than she had looked for many days. And then Marjorie shook hands with the artist, a strange inexplicable comfort for him in her voice and face and hand-shake.

"Miss Castillain," began Lina, as they went slowly along the shadowy lane, "I seem to want to tell you many things, and yet—I cannot."

"Don't try," returned Marjorie, tersely.

"I know I can never repay you in any way," said Lina, with a sob in her voice.

"Oh, what joyful tidings!" cried Marjorie, laughingly; "you couldn't have told me anything more to your own credit, Lina—not anything. Don't you know how 'base is the slave that pays'?"

And then they walked on merrily, talking of other things; while Fitz went slowly back into the empty house, and, standing before the fire, watched the burning into ashes of a square, unopened letter, with the arms of the Athelstons in vermillion on the seal.

He watched the faint and feathery ashes disperse and die; then with a long-drawn sigh, breathed unconsciously, he sat down to his drawing, softly singing the last verse of "Tom Bowling"—softly singing it again and again, as if that, too, came from his lips unconsciously.

CHAPTER II.

BAFFLED.

SEPTEMBER and October had passed. Lady Athelston, once or twice during the two months, had questioned Lina about the lady with whom she had lived in Berkeley Square, but had never, to Lina herself, expressed any surprise at her letter remaining unanswered. By no one else was it ever mentioned. So the life of those Autumn months was undisturbed, and a light-hearted girl would have forgotten that she had been upon the brink of a precipice from which she recoiled with such a fear and trembling. But Lina Chester was not a light-hearted girl, and there ever seemed to hover over her a shadow, "faint yet pursuing."

There is no need to go back and tell how

these two months had passed ; let the sequel show it.

The early breakfast-bell at Hawkedale had clanged through the house half an hour ago, yet still Mr. Castillain and his elder daughter were taking the meal alone, in that dingy breakfast-room, from which the chill was hardly banished by the small fire burning in the grate.

"What time did you get home last night, or rather this morning?" inquired the Squire, looking up sharply from his primitive rasher.

"We left High Athelston soon after one, papa. The party broke up at midnight, but you know that Lady Athelston and Neil always like us to wait as long as we can."

"Stupid things, these perpetual parties they keep up," grumbled the Squire: "stupid and extravagant."

"We need not go if you disapprove of them, papa," rejoined his daughter, dutifully. "Marjorie enjoys them so much that I go for her sake ; but perhaps, if you forbid her, she will listen to you. Of course I have no power over her."

"Let her alone," returned Mr. Castillain, all the more pettishly as he knew his daughter understood how little this proceeding would suit his tactics; "but I cannot have this idleness encouraged in the house. I declare she shall have no breakfast at all, unless she can be down at the proper hour."

"I am for ever reminding her, and begging her to be in time," observed Louisa, plaintively, "but it's no use. Being an hour or two later at night never makes any difference to me."

"Because you're a sensible girl," remarked the old Squire, eyeing his daughter proudly, and feeling what a true Castillain she was.

"A very sensible girl," assented Marjorie, entering the room at that moment; "I wish she wasn't."

"I'll tell you what *I* wish," snapped her father, "and that is, that you would be ready for your meals when your meals are ready for you."

"Not on the morning after a fearfully late dinner party," said Marjorie, coolly, as she took her seat. "I hate the morning after a party, and I curtail it as much as possible. I think it

altogether a mistake to get up until the next day but one."

"Whatever makes you look so queer, Marjorie?" drawled her sister. "You look as if you had been crying all night. Had you any mortification at High Athelston, through that companion of Lady Athelston's?"

If Louisa Castillain *could* have been made to feel ashamed of herself, she would most likely have felt it when her sister's eyes met hers after this speech; but such a feeling was impossible to her, and the strange questioning look on Marjorie's face—so unusually pale this morning—drew from her just a hard little laugh, and nothing more.

Then Marjorie—half in hurt defiance, and half in the effort to hide that her eyes were swollen and her lips unsteady—talked on coolly, as she always could when she was most restless and most pained.

"Papa, when shall you give a return ball to the Athelstons? You see we have been there so often lately, and their ball is this day week—the day of your clothing-club tea, Louie.

What two blessed ordinances to fall on one day!
We must have a grand ball in return, papa;
when shall it be?"

The Squire's sharp and conclusive "never" was only just the answer which Marjorie had expected. But she raised her eyebrows with as much astonishment as if she had had a deeper motive in the conversation than the desire to distract him, and to amuse herself.

"Christmas would be the best time for us to have it," she resumed, idly, as she buttered a finger of toast; "but we can think of it presently. In the meantime I must have a little money, please. I cannot go to the High Athelston ball without a new dress."

"Rubbish!" sneered the Squire. "You've dresses enough, I should think."

"But you think incorrectly," rejoined Marjorie, placidly; "I've nothing fit to wear."

"You ought to be ashamed to say it," answered her father, pushing back his chair angrily. "You have your allowance, and you must make it do. What did I tell you last

year, when your expenses went beyond your income?"

"It wasn't so much that my expenses went beyond my income," she returned, calmly glancing at him as she held her teacup in her hand, "as that my income failed to cover my expenses."

For a moment the Squire drew in his lips to curb a laugh, but his next question was captious enough.

"And what did I tell you then, I say?"

"You said it must never occur again. I therefore wish to give you an early opportunity of preventing it, sir."

"You may depend on this, Marjorie; what you have is all you will have, until you are married and can look to some one else to encourage your extravagance."

"But, my dear sir," spoke Marjorie, looking into her father's face with comic gravity, "you will never get us off your hands if we go out into society ugly and shabby."

"Pray don't talk of 'us'," put in Miss Castil-lain; "I can make my income suffice, and always look well."

"Oh, model daughter of a model parent!" cried Marjorie, with eyes uplifted.

"As long as your sister dresses uncomplainingly on her allowance, I cannot think how you dare grumble," cried Mr. Castillain, hotly.

"Louie saves such a lot out of the household expenses," said Marjorie, quietly, her eyes and thoughts apparently engrossed by the egg she was breaking.

For the first time the colour rushed into Louisa's face—the angry, resentful colour. "Such a suspicion is like you, Marjorie," she stammered.

"Very like me," assented Marjorie, promptly, "and the act is very like you. Papa, can't you give me something that shall be equivalent to Louisa's scrapings out of the housekeeping? It is worth quite a hundred a year to her."

Louisa Castillain was not often taken at a disadvantage, but in the surprise of this sudden and correct statement she was oddly silenced.

"I don't believe it," snapped the Squire, perfectly satisfied with his elder daughter's care and economy. "I only believe that her taste is

not so ridiculously extravagant as yours. Bless me, at what will girls stop now-a-days!"

"At nothing, sir," rejoined Marjorie, readily.

"I think not indeed. Girls were very different when I was young."

"I expect they always did their best, even in those faultless days, to look well according to their means, sir; and I always think there is one bit in the Vicar of Wakefield which wars against nature. You remember where the two girls come in gorgeously dressed for church, and the Vicar remonstrates with them so effectually that they 'go with great composure' that very instant to change their dresses. If Goldsmith had had grown-up daughters of his own, he never would have written that."

"That is your idea, is it?" asked her father with a sneer.

Marjorie gazed meditatively into his face as she answered—

" 'Them's my notions, Sammy, wheerby I means to stick.' Now what are you going to allow me extra, papa?"

"Nothing," replied the Squire, crossly, as he went round to the fire.

Marjorie's quizzical eyes followed him. "Thou art so near—and yet so far," she sang, audaciously. "I ought to be allowed to take the shine out of Louisa now and then," she went on, presently, in a pleasant, unvexed tone. "Don't make faces at me, Louie, I hope it *was* slang. You see, papa, Louisa has the beauty always, so it is but fair that she should give place to me on rare occasions. When I have a new dress I can manage to carry off the palm at a ball, and I do so like to make new conquests."

"You hope your new acquaintances will like you better than the old ones who know you better, I suppose," put in Louisa.

"Not so much that," rejoined Marjorie, with a whimsical glance at her father, "as because I'm tired of the old conquests."

"And so you take up a different order altogether," sneered Miss Castillain.

"I advise you, Marjorie," struck in the Squire, turning sharply to her, "just to take care how you try to play fast and loose with *one* of your

conquests, as you call them. If you lose him, it will be the same as losing every friend you have."

"I'm sure to lose him without the attraction of a new dress," sighed Marjorie; "I feel it over me like a covering, as Mrs. Fry has it in her book."

"You must go looking well," returned her father, shortly, "looking as well as your sister; but you must do it on your own allowance. Others can."

"Oh, what a cram!" cried the girl, with a good-humoured shrug of her shoulders; for which gesture, as well as for the forbidden term, she offered no sort of apology.

"Really, Marjorie," began her sister, "papa has so often prohibited that style of——"

"Look here, papa," struck in his younger daughter, debonnairly, "Neil Athelston has fallen hopelessly in love with his mother's companion, and I expect I shall have to be the one to 'break it gently to his mother'! Won't there be a scene!"

The Squire gazed at her, incredulous and bewildered. Was this one of her random

speeches only? Or was it the utterance of a horrible doubt which had been lately hovering vaguely about him?

"I'm not a bit surprised," she continued, quietly setting down her empty cup. "No man could have resisted her last night when she sang 'The Blind Girl to her Harp.' Louisa, didn't she look beautiful, perfectly beautiful, at that harp of Lady Athelston's? I wonder whether her ladyship ever played it as well, and I wonder who taught Miss Chester? I shall be obliged to have lessons."

"It strikes me you are talking an inexcusable amount of rubbish," interrupted Mr. Castillain, snappishly. "What does that girl—only a kind of upper servant in the house, after all, though I've nothing to say against her—what does she want coming forward as she does, and being made so much of?"

"She amuses and entertains Lady Athelston. What higher mission could a girl have? and she's paid to do it, don't you know?" returned Marjorie. "I'm only telling you how her beauty and her voice struck me—and

others, too; but then she was not the only beautiful girl there. Louie looked very well—exceedingly well—and sang well, too, appealing to the audience with, ‘Oh, say not woman’s heart is bought!’ There wasn’t anyone there who would have been unpolite enough to say it; but still it was wise to be on the safe side. And after *that*, you should have heard Eustace Jelfrey requesting us to Oh! leave him to his sorrow!”

“By heavens, Marjorie!” interposed the Squire, getting very red in the face, “you can be an utter idiot when you like! What has all this to do with Neil Athelston and yourself? Did you make yourself disagreeable?”

“I?” questioned Marjorie, with slow astonishment. “Oh! no; I always make myself agreeable to Neil. That’s why I am jealous of Miss Chester, and that’s why I was so anxious to sing, ‘I wish I didn’t love him, or that he loved me.’”

“Marjorie, how very vulgar some of your ideas are!” drawled Louisa, as she rose from her seat.

"But I resisted the temptation," concluded Marjorie, musingly, "and enjoyed myself as much as I always do—with Neil."

"Of course you do," assented her father, in a quick tone of relief, "and of course you always will, though you talk a great deal of rubbish and buffoonery. Now, don't let me hear anything more of Miss Chester's absurd ambition; I hope you know your own position too well even to notice it. Mind you go to that ball looking as you ought to look. You can afford it well enough."

Uttering which genial and generous command, Mr. Castillain left the room.

"Poets have written, and minstrels have sung 'A Father's Love,'" laughed Marjorie, as the door closed behind him, "but its depths have not quite been sounded yet."

The sisters were standing opposite each other at the fire now, Marjorie with one foot on the fender and her shoulder against the chimney-piece; and Louisa upright on the rug, selecting various keys from the little basket in her hand.

"Before you go, Louie," said her sister, with

a sudden change to that gentle wistfulness which seemed as much to belong to her winning voice as its gaiety did, "I want to ask you one question. When we were at High Athelston last night, Lady Athelston told me that you had been writing again for her about Miss Chester, having been tired of waiting for an answer to your last letter. Is this true?"

"Quite true," assented Miss Castillain, setting the key-basket down upon the table again, and showing nothing of surprise.

With a strong effort, Marjorie checked the words that rose to her lips, and uttered very different ones.

"Why?" she asked, quite gently. "Was not one letter enough?"

"We cannot tell until we know the result of the second one," answered Louisa, chillily.

"Do you think it didn't reach London?"

"How can I tell?" asked the elder sister. "If it were not that—that I know who posted it, I should say there had been foul play."

"From whom?"

"From Miss Chester, or her accomplices— whoever they may be."

"But you *do* know who posted it, and so that is impossible," returned Marjorie, calmly.

She paused a little, then continued with strange earnestness—

"Louie, is that—that second letter gone?"

"Yes."

"And—" the girl's eyes had a dark, sad passion in them, but still she was gentle in all she said—"and again it has been posted by some one you know, and can depend upon?"

"Yes," replied Miss Castillain, jingling her keys with idle *nonchalance*.

"You are quite sure it is too late to stop it?"

"Quite; even if anyone were deceitful enough to wish it stopped."

"Are you never afraid, Louisa, that the wrong you do to others will be visited on yourself—as it is written?"

The low, pained words were uttered without faltering, but the strange passion which darkened her sister's eyes bewildered, and for a moment almost frightened, Miss Castillain.

"Marjorie would have stopped that letter if she could," she thought to herself, as she

made her way to the store-room. "What a good thing that Eustace and I got it off so cleverly the day before yesterday! I wish Lady Athelston had not got gossiping about it to her—it's just like the stupid old thing."

Then Louisa, with her senses all about her, met (and shortened) the demands of the cook, who was housekeeper, and the old man-servant, who was butler and footman in one; while, in the dingy breakfast-room, Marjorie still stood against the chimney-piece, with her face hidden in her hands, and her eyes aching in their tears.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOW CAST BEFORE.

AT the unpainted old wooden gate which led into the kitchen-garden at Hawkedale, stood Marjorie Castillain, on the day of the Athelston ball. She was dressed for walking, but she lingered here in the face of the cutting November wind, and with nothing more attractive to gaze upon than an old gardener sweeping the dead leaves into heaps.

There was a thoughtfulness in the girl's face and attitude, though, with which the old gardener and the dead leaves had nothing to do; but this all changed and vanished suddenly when her sister's voice reached her, and

Miss Castillain herself strolled into sight round the corner of the house.

"Come, Marjorie, what are you staring at?"

"A most curious spectacle," rejoined Marjorie, without turning her eyes, or moving from her leaning posture against the gate. "You see that ancient recruit of the Squire's, and you see that he hasn't a single hair on his head. Well, a few minutes ago he wanted his knife—a great old four-bladed implement—and where do you think he took it from? Out of his cap. Just fancy carrying that trifle on his bald head!"

"Dear me, Marjorie, you always seem to me to be remarking on bald heads," said her sister. "It was only yesterday you told me that the trees in November, with a few leaves sticking here and there, reminded you of a bald-headed man. I never heard such ridiculous similes."

"Except from me," smiled Marjorie, good-humouredly. "What do you want with me, Louisa?"

"I'm going to the school-room now, to see the clothing-club purchases. Are you ready?"

"I'm not going," rejoined Marjorie, almost sadly. "Of what use am I?"

"Never mind that. You ought to go," rejoined Miss Castellain, promptly.

"No, I oughtn't," her sister answered, as promptly.

"Yes, you ought, Marjorie. Everybody says you ought to help me in these good works; and it is really wicked of you to neglect them as you do."

"Don't preach to me," put in Marjorie, with cheerfulness.

"If I don't tell you what you ought to do, I don't know who will," said Louisa, stonily. "I don't know who else would take the trouble, for such a thankless return."

"Have you finished?" asked Marjorie, turning to her, with raised eyebrows. "I don't value your sermons an atom, Louie; I feel, on the whole, more pious without them; and I'm not going to the schools. I don't want a walk. I'm reserving my complexion for the ball."

"I shall tell Neil that to-night," said Louisa, with her unpleasant little laugh. "And I

wouldn't tell falsehoods if I were you. You told some of the women that you should go to see their things to-day."

"Ah! so I did," was the bright answer. "Come along—I'm ready."

"And you are going that way, are you?" inquired Miss Castillain, with a glance at her sister's garden-hat and old leather gauntlets.

"In these gloves, you mean? Of course I am. I never feel quite happy unless I have a pair of these on hand."

"I don't care," grumbled Louisa, as they went on together. "If you choose to look a fright, I can't help it."

"No one would ever think, would they," questioned Marjorie, gravely, "that I was the daughter of a millionaire? I hope he will get to hear public opinion so expressed. How dare he allow me only such a pittance, and call it enough? How dare he refuse to give me ever so little extra, when I entreat, as a week ago I entreated, for a dress to wear to-night?"

"Well, I am sure you are coming out quite gorgeous enough, after all," put in Louisa, a little spitefully.

"Of course. I've mortgaged to a tremendous extent, though, to obtain that pleasing result. *Now* if I don't make a sensation, I know it will be through your bringing me out into this cutting wind, to destroy my complexion, and make my nose red."

"Perhaps some propitious fate will lure Miss Chester out, too, on this all important day," suggested Louisa, with her hard laugh.

"Nothing could destroy Miss Chester's complexion," asserted Marjorie, generously, "nor make her nose red; and if you think for a moment that I ever dream of rivalling *her*, Louisa, you are wildly mistaken."

"Of course not. Your friendship for Lady Athelston's companion is just the romantic and delightful friendship of two people who have one strong taste in common, and pursue one noble end. Wait until the noble end has to make a choice."

"O jest unseen, inscrutable, invisible, as the nose on a man's face, or a weathercock on a steeple!" said Marjorie, laughing heartily. "Here we are! What a pity! We might have

enjoyed a few more piquant and spicy little jokes."

The afternoon was drawing to a close when Marjorie caught sight, from the school-room window, of Lina Chester walking alone over the fields towards High Athelston. The women's tea was over. Marjorie had done her part in amusing and providing for them, and now she slipped away and joined Lina.

"I'm so glad," she said, taking her hand ; "I want a walk, and I will go a little way with you."

Something in Marjorie Castillain's manner to her for the last week had been new to Lina, and puzzled her a good deal. There was a tenderness and pitifulness in it, as if some sorrow were felt for her which she could not feel for herself. Ah ! how could it be otherwise, when Marjorie knew how cunningly her sister had done her cruel work at last, and that that discovery which Lina dreaded might happen now on any day ?

"Have you been to the school, then, Miss Castillain ?"

"Yes, officiating at Louisa's clothing club festival, which was a most depressing success."

"Did you aid in the depression or the success, Miss Marjorie?" asked Lina, laughing.

"I didn't know what to do. Louisa said I must go, so I went; but I could only conduct myself according to my dim lights, trying on the shawls and pouring out the tea. I should have come off with flying colours if there had been sufficient breeze to fly them, which is, being interpreted, if I'd been sufficiently appreciated."

Glancing down into her companion's face, Marjorie paused a minute, as if her lips longed to utter other words; but at that instant Lina looked up with a smile, and then Marjorie resumed her light tones.

"You should have seen one old woman, Lina; you would have laughed. She took her place at my table with the most resigned and absorbed expression of countenance, and then, sighing very plaintively, helped herself to cake. While she gave me a melancholy recital of her widowhood, she slid the cake into her lap, and pocketed it; and this she did over and

over again, sighing each time more and more heavily, and looking more and more lugubrious; yet each time I handed her the cake, she helped herself to the largest piece with much humility. Oh! Lina, I did wonder how far south her pocket extended! Will you come with me across the meadow, and out into Nether Lane—to Mr. Spendir's cottage?"

The question was asked so suddenly, that it was no wonder Lina hesitated.

"Do come," urged Marjorie. "I have a request I want to make; and you know the little boy has been ill; I want to ask after him. Oh! Lina, it has been almost more than I could bear, to go and see him through his fever, and to find him always, always reading aloud to his father when he was able. Such funny books too! I can't think where they got them, unless at the second-hand place in Churchill. And there was the father always sitting at his work, ready to listen and sympathise and talk, but always busy. I know he works too hard. He is etching borders in Miss Jorden's album now, and putting so much

beautifully fine work in them, for hardly any payment, I know; and all the time the boy reads on and on. Oh! Lina, what a funny life it is for them! Think of *his* education, and of Jack Esdaile's! and yet I know the artist's boy has the better tutor. How I wonder what their lives will be!"

"They are all marked out for them, I suppose," said Lina, gently.

"Oh! hush!" cried Marjorie, in hasty earnestness. "That's a terrible idea; don't promulgate it. My one consolation at night is that tomorrow *may* bring forth anything."

And so, talking of everything but that one sad subject which was uppermost in Marjorie's mind, they reached the cottage.

Miss Castillain's errand to Mr. Spendir was to ask him to give her a few lessons in drawing; and Lina stood by, in wondering silence to hear him pleasantly and courteously refuse.

"I really could not do it, Miss Castillain, however much I wished," he said. "I have seen a drawing of yours far better than any of mine, and——"

"And what, Mr. Spendir?" she asked, quizzically.

"And this wish," he said, the scarlet rising slowly in his dark face, "is only a continuance of the kindness you have shown us all through Jet's illness. I cannot help understanding it so."

"This is too bad, when I had set my heart upon it," fretted Marjorie; "and I have been saving on purpose. If you only knew the difficulty of saving on a small allowance, Mr. Spendir, you would value my efforts."

Again the red rushed over the artist's dark skin.

"I know that difficulty, Miss Castillain," he answered, quietly.

"Do you? Then will you consent to teach me?" the girl asked, eagerly.

"I could not," he said, with a laugh which was not very genuine; "it would be a case of Bleys and Merlin. Please don't ask me."

And Marjorie, seeing how much in earnest he was, though knowing that that was not his reason, let it pass.

"I can at any rate spend on his child those savings which he is too proud to take," she thought.

"I shall slowly saunter back," said Marjorie, when the girls stood at the gate before they parted. "I've quarrelled with Louisa, and cannot with dignity address her for two hours at least. Lina,"—the words kept back so long were on her lips at last, while a great tenderness shone in her beautiful eyes;—"Lina, I am always dull, and—and foreboding like—in the dusk of a November day; are you? and I feel now as if, at any minute, I might be suddenly made to face some unexpected fear or sorrow. So I want to be sure that *you* would be my firm friend through all, and that I might, in all confidence, come to you for help and sympathy."

"Oh, Miss Castillain," began Lina; but some look in Marjorie's face, and some sweet new tone in her wooing voice, made Lina's words falter, and her eyes grow sad and wistful.

"And, Lina, before we separate will you promise me—oh, promise, dear, as I have promised you—that if any unexpected danger

threatens *you*, you will come to me—just as I shall come to you; and let me help and sympathize with you—I will not say as a sister would, but as anyone would who loved you *very truly, very trustingly?*”

The thanks faltered on Lina’s lips, but she gave Marjorie her hand with a grateful, child-like confidence; and no uttered words could have made the compact a more sacred one than it was, sealed only with that silent hand-clasp.

All the thoughtful gravity vanished from Marjorie’s face when suddenly, on her return across the fields, she met Sir Neil Athelston riding home alone, in his hunting-dress.

“Good sport, Neil?”

“Capital. Why wasn’t your father with us to-day, Marjorie?”

“He didn’t feel very brilliant,” she answered, laughing. “He had a tiring day yesterday, as well as an adventure. He was shooting, and in one of the covers he left his hat and wig in a bramble. He hasn’t yet quite got over it—the circumstance, I mean, not the bramble.”

"He saved his head, I hope?" laughed Sir Neil.

"Oh, yes," replied the girl, gravely. "Trust a Castillain to save something. I came to see the start this morning, as I promised, Neil, but I wouldn't go further. I wouldn't drive, because Miss Chester wouldn't; and papa forbids me to ride, because I *must* follow the hounds when I have the chance."

"Why didn't you persuade her?" asked Neil, flushing as he spoke of Lina Chester, even so casually.

"I had no hope of succeeding," said Marjorie, gravely, "when I saw you turn back on purpose to persuade her—and fail."

"How did you know?" asked Neil, with a forced laugh.

"Oh, I knew, though the popular opinion was that you went back for your smelling-bottle."

"Hold hard, Marjorie. What an awfully sarcastic girl you are! I am not such a fop as that."

"No—oh, no," assented the girl, readily; "popular opinion was, as usual, at fault."

"Have you had your bouquet for to-night, Marjorie?"

"No, I don't intend to carry one. It is conventional to carry a bouquet and fan. I hate conventionality."

"But you will carry the flowers I send you, Marjorie?" he asked, smiling.

"Of course," she said, with a quick change in her tone.

"That's right. I will take care that they are worth wearing. You are sure to look nice, Marjorie."

"And so are you, Neil," the girl said, with a comical glance into his blue eyes.

"I verily believe you think I care how I look."

"I don't think," she answered, with raised eyebrows; "I am sure."

"You always did give me chief credit for that sort of thing," he muttered, with an annoyed emphasis.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "and for more. We are very old friends, Neil," she went on, with unexpected seriousness. "Let us think as

little ill of each other as we possibly can, and—
and—*always* trust each other.”

“Of course I always shall—I couldn’t help it,” said Neil, not understanding one half the generous earnestness of the girl, nor faintly guessing either what sort of a sorrow she feared for him, or what the offer of her trust and sympathy should mean.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BALL AT HIGH ATHELSTON.

LADY ATHELSTON had sent her maid to beg Miss Chester's attendance in her room as soon as she was dressed that night; and Fletcher stood at Lina's door, looking frigidly in upon the girl, as she delivered her message.

Margaret had been assisting Miss Chester; but Margaret had gone away now, and Lina was sitting alone at the fire, writing with just as much ease as if she had not been dressed for one of the state balls of High Athelston. "And not looking at all like it, either," thought Fletcher. "She's not much used to company, that's certain—as why should she be?—and what my lady wants with her downstairs at all, I can't think."

"Yes, I am ready, I will come in a few minutes, you need not wait," said Lina, looking up from her desk, and speaking with that gentle dignity which belonged to her, and which so often baffled Sir Neil Athelston.

"Dear me!" muttered Fletcher, as she retraced her steps along the brilliantly-lighted corridors, "to think that such as she can put on airs and graces to me, and yet that I don't return it to her in so many direct words! I did hear her beg my lady to let her stay in her own room to-night, and I can't think why on earth she shouldn't. It doesn't seem to me very proper for the companion to be just like the guests; it never is in any other family that I know. Why, dear me! I might just as well dress up and go myself; though as for dressing up," concluded Fletcher, with a haughty sniff, "it isn't much she's done to herself, after all, and it isn't very nice that she'll look among ladies—among ladies who know where laces and flowers and jewels ought to be worn."

Lina, all unconscious of this free and unflattering criticism, followed the maid to Lady

Athelston's dressing-room, and stood, a little shyly and a little doubtfully, beside the chair where her ladyship sat patiently undergoing Fletcher's finishing touches among the laces on the thick light hair in which there was no trace of the silver either of age or thought.

"Well," she questioned, looking up into her companion's face with a smile, "have you reconciled yourself to the prospect of the crowd—or, rather, have you come to your senses?"

"I still wish—I still wish with all my heart that you would not bid me join your guests, my lady," said the girl, with a wistful earnestness in her voice.

"You silly child!" Lady Athelston answered, speaking almost tenderly, as it seemed (at times) most natural to do to the lonely, unselfish, gentle girl, whose influence over her was true and wise, and whose own noble qualities could not but rouse the dormant good of other natures, where the good might be dormant, and the soil but shallow. "You very silly child!" she repeated, laughing. "Sir Neil and Miss Castillain will want to hear you at my old harp

again, and I shall want you to talk it all over with me to-morrow. I cannot let you off, and I am sure you will enjoy it; girls always do enjoy a gay scene such as this will be; though, of course, *you* will not dance, unless for some special reason. You could not dance, you know, my dear, even if anyone were polite enough to ask you, while any of the lady-guests sat."

"And I do not care to dance," said Lina, in cold, quiet tones.

"Well, now," remarked Lady Athelston, not, of course, having heard that reply, "come round here; I want to see you, now that you are dressed. What nonsense is this?" she added sharply, as Lina went up to the fire. "You don't call yourself dressed for a ball, do you? I don't like anything so dowdy as that. Why do you wear a high dress? Turn round again."

Lina turned, a shy smile on her lips, and Lady Athelston scrutinized her keenly through her glittering eyeglass. But though for the moment vexed in her surprise, the displeasure

could not rest in Lady Athelston's eyes as they took in the surpassing beauty of the girl at whom she gazed.

Over a long, untrimmed dress of white silk, low in the neck and with small, short sleeves, she wore an upper skirt and high body of soft transparent white, the exquisite whiteness of her neck and arms gleaming through it, unrelieved by gold or jewels of any kind, but the whiteness of the whole broken artistically by the tiny bouquet at her neck of crimson fuschia and delicate fern.

"Nothing even in your hair!" cried Lady Athelston, gazing from the girl's anxious, beautiful face to the dark hair dressed high on the graceful head.

"You do not look pleased, Lady Athelston," she said, almost beseechingly. "I had better far not go into the reception-rooms."

"Rubbish, child!" echoed her ladyship, curtly. "I choose you shall come; and—and I don't think you look bad. I don't think you *could* look anything but—anything but well, wear what you may. But something in your face al-

ways puzzles me stupidly, some familiarity in the features. Pooh! I have so often said I will not think of it any more. It only makes me worry, and does no good, and it will turn out only some ridiculous fancy when I do find out of whom you remind me. Come."

"Sir Neil says," remarked Lina, with a strange anxiety in her eyes, and a tightening of her lips, "that my face reminds him of one of the pictures in the portrait gallery here, but that he can never be quite sure which picture it is."

"A stupid fancy like my own, I suppose," returned Lady Athelston, rather sharply, as she gave one quick glance into the beautiful grave face beside her. "Come along, child."

The ball-room at High Athelston (or, as the Old Athelstons called it, the Banquetting Hall) extended all down one wing, and looked to Lina a vast and brilliant vista of flowers and lights, as she and Lady Athelston lingered a minute at the door, on their way down to the drawing-rooms.

In the small gallery at one end, the musicians were taking their places, the leader receiving

some directions from Sir Neil, who stood on the waxed floor, talking up to him. But the instant the young Baronet caught sight of his mother and her companion, he turned on his heel and joined them, his whole face lighting up.

Sir Neil Athelston was one of those well-made and high-bred men on whom any dress sits gracefully and well, and who, in modern full dress—a trying test—look always handsome, with a real grace and ease. Lina saw this, though she was hardly aware that the thought had shaped itself to her, yet the brightness which the gaiety of the scene had brought to her eyes, died completely and suddenly out of them when he came up to her side, throwing back his head a little, while his laughing blue eyes took in every item of her dress.

“How beautiful!” he exclaimed involuntarily. “And yet is it a real sort of ball dress? It is too white, and too plain—and yet, what *does* make you look so lovely?”

She moved away, to allow Sir Neil to offer his arm to his mother.

"You are resplendent, my lady," he said merrily, as he gave it her. "Wait there one moment, Miss Chester, and I will come for you."

But Lina preferred to follow, and when Neil turned from the drawing-room door, there she was, close to him. Then, meeting her suddenly so, something in her appearance struck him. He started a little, his eyes intent.

"Is it the old puzzling likeness, Sir Neil?" she asked, lightly, as she moved to pass him.

But whatever it had been, he turned it nervously away now, and spoke of something else—taking a kind of refuge in the new complaint he had found against her.

"You have not my flowers, Miss Chester; and the few you wear you have gathered and arranged yourself, as I can see. Why do you always neglect what I myself choose and cut for you?"

"I like my own choice, thank you," she said gravely. "I asked you not to trouble yourself."

"It is no trouble," said Sir Neil, "nothing is

any trouble that I do for you ; if you only would not scorn, as you do, all my attempts to please you, and——”

“And to make me look passable,” added Lina, lightly.

- “You know that *that* is not what I mean,” said the Baronet, rather angrily ; “but stop, Miss Chester, let me give you your programme. How many dances will you give me ?”

“I am not going to dance,” she said ; “I do not want a programme.”

“Nonsense,” he cried, now really angry ; “you must dance ; no meddler in this house shall prevent that, while I am master here.”

Lady Athelston had passed on now, up the brilliant rooms, and so was doubly out of hearing. Lina looked after her rather wistfully, but she could answer Sir Neil coolly too, and he could not detect the tone of satire in her voice.

“I think you have no need to remind us that you are master in the house, Sir Neil ; but even in that capacity you cannot make its inmates dance against their will.”

"I must make *you*," he said, entreatingly. "If I dance with no one else in all the room, I will dance with you, Miss Chester."

"Please let me pass, Sir Neil. Lady Athelston will wonder where I am."

"Let her wonder!" ejaculated her son, impatiently. "I have something to say to you, which I must say now, for the words force themselves from me. Don't turn away. By Heaven, Lina, you think nothing of insulting a fellow in his own house!"

"I do not want to insult you," interrupted Lina, in quick pain. "I wish you never would speak to me so, Sir Neil. Why will you not remember that I am here only as a paid dependant of your mother's?"

Even Neil could see what difficulty the girl had in uttering these words, and that only a great fear could have wrung them from her; but, in his selfishness and infatuation, he had no pity.

"Lina," he whispered, taking one of her gloved hands in both of his, "don't say those words again; they hurt me—and, by all I love!

—they anger me beyond words. My mother doesn't care for your help ; your patient, uncomplaining help. Any other girl—one who is not fit to hold a candle to you, even in your sleep—would suit her selfish will ; would save her idle hands, as well as you are doing. She does not value you, and it makes me mad to see her placid acceptance of your service. She does not love you," he went on, a deep passion stirring his voice, "and I do—beyond anything else on earth. Lina, come away with me."

The beautiful, innocent eyes, never flinching in their gaze, met his in simple, childlike surprise.

"Sir Neil, I am tired of this jest. Will you let me join my lady?"

"Don't call her 'my lady,'" he interrupted, pettishly ; "you only do it to vex me. I hate to hear anything servile from your lips, and you know it. Lina, my darling," he broke off again, his short-lived anger dwindling before his passionate admiration, "my beautiful little darling, I know they none of them think of you

as I think of you, and they can never love you as I love you—there's no one in the world who could. Come away from them all. Let me take you where no cold looks can ever reach you and pain you. My darling, see how I am waiting to choose you before all the world."

The white face was hardly whiter than its wont, but a great fear and a terrible distress darkened the wide eyes which were still raised to his, and which never drooped as she answered, with brave quietness,

"It will be easy for me to forget these meaningless words of yours, Sir Neil. Before this ball is over they will be for both of us as if they had never been uttered. Listen, your first guests have arrived."

These first guests were the Misses Castillain; and so soon they entered after Lina's words, that the quick eyes of Neil's betrothed caught the startled and defeated glance upon his face, and understood the very unusual constraint of his manner; but neither a smile nor a shade of pique showed him that she saw it. Before she had ceased her greeting to Lina, he had re-

gained his easy composure—regained it entirely, though by a great effort—and was ready to pay attention to his first guests, just in his old vain, idle, yet pleasant way.

He offered Louisa Castillain his arm to lead her up the suite of rooms to Lady Athelston; and Marjorie, still lingering with Miss Chester, followed them with her eyes.

“Doesn’t Louie look killing?” she asked, only to hide some graver thought.

Lina smiled, without answering. She was not thinking of Miss Castillain, in her flounced and flower-strewn dress, but of the younger sister, who leaned with careless grace upon a fauteuil near, looking so wonderfully bright and winning.

“Do you like my dress, Lina?” she asked, so suddenly that Lina started from her intent gaze.

“I was not thinking of the dress,” she said, stammering.

“Of course not. I never guessed it. But I cannot afford to mortgage my half-year’s in-

come and win no admiration in return. Please to admire me."

"I think, Miss Castillain," said Lina, shyly, "that I never know exactly what you wear, because—because what you wear is always so thoroughly a part of you. I could never imagine not liking a dress of yours, as I could never imagine not liking *you*."

"Thanks!" said Marjorie, with a laugh; "my spirits are rising. You don't know how they fell when Louisa told me that she never did admire my taste, and that the less I questioned her about it the better."

"I think," said Lina, "that you look like an old picture. I mean the picture of a girl of fifty years ago."

"Old-fashioned, eh?" laughed Marjorie, rising, queen-like in her rich and quaintly-made dress and tunic, of delicate pink si and soft, white lace; the bright brown hair, a wealth of beauty in itself, crowned by a tiny cap of lace, fine almost as a spider's web, which was, in design and fabric, the very essence of coquetry. "But do you know,

Lina—either your words put it into my head, or the look of you—you remind me of a picture, too; and a picture in this very house? Don't be offended that I don't pay you the compliment you paid me, and imply that you look picturesque; for the picture you remind me of is—it can't be," mused the girl, checking herself; "and yet—Lina, you small, beautiful girl, can it be possible for you to remind me of a gentleman's portrait?"

"I don't know," laughed Lina, constrainedly; "I suppose such chance likenesses sometimes occur."

"Marjorie," said Sir Neil, joining them again—(and Marjorie Castillain noticed that, for all the excitement in his voice, it had a heaviness quite new to it)—"Marjorie, you, too, have neglected my flowers."

Marjorie detected the unconscious emphasis and understood it.

"There was too much scarlet for my pink," she said, curtly.

"I'm very sorry; why did you not tell

me what colours you wished? You have no flowers at all."

"No," she answered, with her bright, ready blush; "Colonel Stuart sent his bouquet to Louisa and me, conjointly; so of course I wouldn't touch it. I hate partnership with Louie!"

"You like things sent definitely to one of you?" questioned Neil, with rather a forced laugh; "and you don't care which?"

"I like them to be intended for Cæsar or Pompey," she said—"especially Pompey."

Then Neil took Marjorie, too, up to his mother; and Lina still lingered alone in the great outer drawing-room, not guessing that Marjorie's willingness to leave her behind was only kindness.

"How can you make that poor girl join in these things, Neil?" asked Louisa, speaking low, as he and Marjorie came up. "It must be a wretched ordeal for her; what can she understand of high society?"

"As much as is necessary."

"If she does come among your guests,"

Miss Castillain continued, biting her lips a little, but still speaking suavely, as she always did to Neil or his mother, "she ought to have proper feeling, and come dressed suitably. No old maid or dowager will look so dowdy and stiff in her dress."

"What, Neil?" his mother questioned, catching a little of this speech. "What are you all saying?"

"Louisa says," returned Sir Neil, with a twinkle in his eyes, "that your little companion is a model for dowagers; thinking, I suppose, that she comports herself like a duchess."

"The duchesses would not feel much flattered," said Louisa, with her harsh laugh, though she pretended to take it pleasantly in jest.

"I know only one duchess," said Marjorie, "and *she* doesn't comport herself at all. I pity Miss Chester if she is like that little awkward dumpling."

Neil glanced at her, and for the life of him he could not prevent his eyes thanking her; but

Marjorie little heeded that. She had let him bring her away from Lina for Lina's own sake, but other guests were arriving now, and so she made her way among them (showering gay smiles and greetings as she went), back to the spot where Lina Chester lingered, looking on at the gay scene as one may remember to have looked at such things in a dream:

How kind and thoughtful Marjorie was to her all through that night! And, when Colonel Stuart came, he was so, too, in his grave, protecting way. With his ever-ready, ever-thoughtful courtesy, he gave her a place among the most honoured of the guests, and such a place as Sir Neil's impetuous admiration and devotion could never have succeeded in establishing for her.

And yet what way will the protecting kindness of one or two simple, unsuspecting natures go, against the subtle poison of jealous and suspicious tongues? Even the whispered comments of Louisa Castillain alone, could have destroyed Lina Chester's pleasure; but they alone were not left to do it. Eustace Jelfrey held a similar

power in his hands, and used it mercilessly too.

Perhaps Sir Neil Athelston held a greater power of hurting her even than these two. Though his opportunities of speaking to her were few (as he had a host's part to play), yet he could unconsciously interfere most of all with her enjoyment, by rousing the jealousy and spleen of those who were quick to resent the unconscious rivalry of the girl who, in her dependent position, stood so far below them, yet in her wondrous beauty so far above.

Lina was standing by the couch on which sat Lady Athelston. She had been called for some trifling reason; and then, with a careless selfishness, Lady Athelston had bidden her "stay there a little, I may want you."

And the girl stood there, pleased even at those words. There was some one to whom she might possibly be of use.

The ball was at its height. The couples whirled past close to the sofa against which Lina stood; it was a gay and brilliant scene altogether, and the music gave her beautiful, dreamy thoughts. She would think of the

pleasant part, and that only. Poor, lonely girl ! Simple as the resolution was, no other more really brave, more purely unselfish, was made in all the radiant throng that night.

Only a few of the moving figures did Lina's eyes care to follow, and of these the chief was Marjorie Castillain, who jested randomly, and laughed brightly, and danced exquisitely, yet who seemed (to those grateful, watchful eyes) to be always fighting against some want which rose to her lips and eyes.

"How openly and daringly Marjorie Castillain flirts !" was a comment which had reached Lina's ears many times ; and she knew that it was true, and yet not *all* the truth ; though "all the truth" was not to be made clear yet, even to her.

But, rashly as Marjorie flung her witty words and infectious laughter around her, there was one in the room who received not even the smallest share. To Eustace Jelfrey she vouchsafed neither word nor glance.

Again and again had he entreated for a dance, but her negative was always prompt, and cold,

and decisive ; and her repeated refusals and cold neglect were rousing within him a very demon of spite and jealousy.

To one small revenge could Eustace Jelfrey look forward ; and, in the anticipation of this, he smiled and danced and flattered still. And the night wore on, and Marjorie, in her brilliant excitement, grew more and more beautiful, with that irresistible and incomprehensible beauty of hers which no one ever could describe.

Colonel Stuart was lingering beside Lady Athelston's couch ; the very duchess whom Marjorie had called a dumpling had been talking into the elevated trumpet, but she broke off on the Colonel's approach ; for there are some men before whom women's trivial gossip drops lifeless to the ground. Lady Athelston's eyes turned from the dancers, and met his with a pleased little smile in them.

"I am so glad to see you all enjoying yourselves," she said, "as I trust you are. Does not Neil make a matchless host, and is not Marjorie a queen among all the girls, Colonel Stuart ? Don't you call her beautiful to-night ?"

"Do you, Miss Chester?" he asked, with an amused smile.

"She is always beautiful to me, Colonel Stuart," Lina answered, simply.

"Why?"

"Her face is so intensely winning, and so true."

"But," he said, the smile still in his eyes, "it is never the same two minutes together. How can you judge?"

"It is not judgment exactly, Colonel Stuart," she answered, thoughtfully. "It must be something over which I have less control than my judgment."

"Perhaps so," he said, lightly, though the smile deepened to seriousness in his eyes. "Perhaps it is. Lady Helen Burton has just been giving me her opinion, too, and she summed it up in very few words, and those borrowed ones. She could only say—and very distressed she seemed about it—that 'her manners have not that repose which marks the house of Vere de Vere!' Do you think so?"

"I am sure they have not," laughed Lina,

softly. "But, if I may borrow words to describe my idea of her, they will be Lord Townley's, in the old play, 'She is pleasant to live with.'"

Colonel Stuart laughed heartily.

"Your words are not half so imposing as Lady Helen's," he said. "And I'm afraid the title of the old play you quote is rather suggestive of Neil's future. Isn't it *The Provoked Husband*?"

But now the old duchess rose and took his arm, and they went away together.

"What have you and Colonel Stuart been laughing about, Lina?" inquired Marjorie, when, a few minutes afterwards, she escaped from the crowd.

"You, Miss Castillain. Shall I tell you what he says?" asked Lina, trying to look as if she were as happy as Marjorie seemed to be, only because she fancied Marjorie would like to think her so.

"I know," Miss Castillain answered, a look of strange weariness crossing her face just for an instant; "he said, what he has said before

to-night, that he despises a flirt ; he never even uses the less despicable French word. Lina, do you hate a flirt ?”

“A real one ? Yes,” replied Lina, hesitating over the truthful word.

“A real one !” echoed Marjorie, with her bright, low laugh. “Oh ! doesn’t that show the narrowness of the English language ? A flirt is a flirt, Lina ; defined, a contemptible specimen of flighty, volatile womanhood. Oh ! isn’t English a small language ?”

“I dislike the French word much more,” said Lina, gravely.

“So do I,” was the quick reply. “I hate all words that express it, if there are more than those two, which I hope there are not.”

“And yet——”

“Yes,—*and yet*,” interrupted Marjorie with a quick, gentle touch on Lina’s arm, “that’s all. Don’t finish the sentence, my little grave and dear rebuker.”

Just then Colonel Stuart returned to claim Marjorie for the approaching dance. She turned to meet his eyes, her own very demure.

"I have changed my mind," she said, naïvely. "You have been flirting," and, by the slight stress she laid upon 'the word, Lina guessed for what he had been rebuking her; "and it's not at all right, Colonel Stuart, because you know you are engaged to Lady Helen Burton."

Colonel Stuart laughed out frankly, but her eyes never lost their look of serious reproach.

"That is said on good authority," she went on, in cool explanation. "Indeed, I believe that good authority itself told it to Mr. Jelfrey, who told it to me. And so, being engaged, Colonel Stuart," she concluded, her merry lips set solemnly, "it is not honourable in you to behave as you do—especially to the dowagers."

"You have given me the right to speak to you now, Miss Marjorie," said the Colonel, with a gentle gravity, which had no vestige of sternness in it. "I may ask if it is right for you, being engaged, to behave as you do—except to the dowagers?"

The hot blood darted across the girl's face, and rash proud words passed her lips, words

which were no sooner uttered than they were repented of bitterly. But then they were uttered, and what availed the repentance?

"If—if I could only take his words as I take those of other people!" she thought, her heart beating fast in her self-anger and her pain. "If I only could, and did not rise up with every power I possess to vex and thwart him! It is always to do me good that he speaks. But then—but then that's the very reason it's so hard to bear. What business has he to try to do me good? What difference will it make in *his* life whether I'm good or bad? And what right has he always to be the one to remind me of my duty towards Neil? I know I shall tell him some day that it is he who has made me hate Neil—by his very mention of him."

"Miss Marjorie"—Colonel Stuart's was the voice that broke in upon that passionate thought—"from such a speech I judge that the fulfilment of your promise to dance with me would be a drawback to your pleasure; so I will leave you free."

She bowed with a smile upon her lips, and he

left her. Then Lina saw how hurt and pained she was.

"It is always the same," she said impetuously, as Lina laid her gentle little hand on the restless fingers upon which Marjorie leaned at the end of the couch. "Don't look at me, dear; I feel a little idiotic—just as if some one had put me into a dark room to unravel a tangled skein of cobwebs. Don't laugh. What does it mean—you know—about seeing only 'a straight staff bent in a pool'?"

"That out of the pool, Miss Castillain, if we look——"

But Lina broke off here, for Eustace Jelfrey had joined them, and was earnestly begging Marjorie to dance with him.

"I *was* engaged for this dance," she answered, absently, "but am not now. I may as well dance it with you as with any one."

Her assent, almost unconscious though it was, astonished Lina, but it astonished Mr. Jelfrey still more. His eyes flashed exultantly as she took his arm; and Lina, watching his face as he

proudly led her off, actually trembled to see how her smile could change him.

Colonel Stuart looked after them as they passed to their places, but he sought no partner himself for this dance, which had been Marjorie's promised one.

Sir Neil Athelston had been watching for his opportunity, and as soon as Lina was left, he sauntered to her; sauntered with as deliberate a step as if his heart-beats had been deliberate too.

"It is only those slow old Lancers next, Miss Chester," he said; "I will take no denial for that dance."

"I cannot, Sir Neil," she answered, her eyes almost piteous as she tried to make her refusal easy and natural. "Other ladies will sit, and so I would rather not dance."

"Confound it!" he cried, in his hot impatience, "why must other ladies sitting a dance prevent your joining in it? Are you to be left out all the evening? Some ladies must sit out now and then, as there are fewer gentlemen than ladies here. Marjorie says there always are,"

he added, with his gay laugh, "and that nature ought to thin the ladies, as a gardener does his stocks. But I think nature thins them quite enough in another way. Come, Miss Chester."

But the gay, wooing tones and outstretched arm were equally unheeded by Lina.

"Mother," said Sir Neil, speaking into the trumpet, with a suppressed petulance, "if you don't insist on Miss Chester dancing the next dance—it's only the Lancers—I shall leave the party altogether. I will not witness the absurdity of her waiting upon you all night, and refusing everyone who asks her, as if you were tyrant."

A clever hit that, of Sir Neil's—and it told.

Lady Athelston turned to Lina with an injured frown.

"Miss Chester, how can you be so silly as to hesitate when Sir Neil is good enough to offer to introduce you himself? Go at once, pray; I don't care to be thought a tyrant."

Neil's naturally sleepy eyes were full of laughing triumph when he felt the small gloved hand upon his arm at last.

"Now the room looks what it should look to me," he said, with a sigh of real relief and happiness. "Did you think I was going to deny myself all night? Do you think a man's patience can bear, for long, the isolation you have made me bear to-night, Lina?"

"They are forming for the Lancers, Sir Neil," she said, with quiet coldness. "Shall we take our places?"

"Here, please—a little further on," he said, leading her to the set farthest from Lady Athelston's group, and nearest to the curtained door which led from the ball-room.

And when the dance was over, turning back again upon his arm, Lina found herself, before she was aware, out in the long and unfrequented gallery.

"I never had such a dance in my life," Sir Neil was saying. "It seemed to be over in less than half a minute. No wonder," he added, his voice sounding doubly low in the vaulted corridor—"it was my first dance with my first love."

"Why do we go this way, Sir Neil?" asked Lina, trying to draw her hand from his. "There

is no other entrance to the ball-room. Let us turn."

"You always refuse to understand me, Lina," the young man interrupted, hastily; "you always treat me as if you thought I was making a mistake, or something equally ridiculous. Why won't you understand that I love you as I never loved anyone before in my life?"

"Sir Neil," said Lina, very calmly (she had drawn away her hand now, and was standing against one of the long windows, the little white-robed figure looking more beautiful than she imagined, against the heavy crimson curtains)—"Sir Neil, why will you not understand what an insult your love is to me, and how hard it is for me patiently to bear an insult from you?"

"I insult you!" he interrupted.

"Yes, with a deeper and more cruel insult than you offered me the day you saw me first."

"How do you mean?" asked Neil, blind to every thought but how he loved her, and happy only to stand there and gaze upon her beauty. "Tell me how I insult you, Lina, when I would

rather anger every soul in there than you alone."

"I do not care to tell you what you know so well, Sir Neil," she answered, wearily. "If you were engaged to me" (calmly as she said it, her thoughts only following out one idea, the scarlet rushed to his face at the words), "would you dare to say to Miss Marjorie Castillain what you have said to me to-night? You know you would not insult her—I must use the word—as you have insulted me; you know that, as the case is reversed, you think no shame of insulting a dependent. What your treachery is to Miss Castillain, I cannot bear to say."

"I cannot help it," put in Neil, moodily. "I can no more prevent myself loving you than I can prevent your being beautiful. I never loved Marjorie; I know now that I never understood what love meant until I saw you. Oh! Lina, my first love, my only love, why should you be the one to turn away from me—you, the only one to whom I ever pleaded? Let us go away, my darling; wherever you like. The

very slightest wish that you can form I will carry out. I have wealth, and power, and strength, and youth. Lina, could you not be happy with me? Oh! surely yes, when I love you with such devotion. Only just one word, my precious love; only whisper one word, and years of happiness can be ours—yours and mine, dear—happiness only like a dream.”

“I shall go away from High Athelston, Sir Neil,” said Lina, speaking low and almost with calmness, though her heart beat wildly in her fear, and the unusual colour burned in a feverish spot on either cheek. “That is the only thing left for me to do.”

“Go away!” he echoed, passionately. “If you do go—if you go without me—I shall follow you; ay, to the world’s end, my precious one.”

And then, in the madness of his love, he forgot her loneliness and her claim upon him, and caught her in his arms and kissed her, as a brave and honourable man would have died rather than kiss one woman while he was engaged to another.

A moment afterwards he stood alone where she had left him, the blood dyeing his face as the sound of a distant step made him turn again hurriedly. Then face to face the two men met, who were never to meet as friends after this night.

A few skilfully chosen and well-timed words from Eustace Jelfrey, won the truth from Sir Neil; and a little advice, crafty as the man's nature, sent him back to the ball-room, hopeful again. Then the tutor passed down the gallery in his search for Lina, smiling as he went.

CHAPTER V.

JELFREY'S LAST THREAT.

LOUISA CASTILLAIN held Lady Athelston in custody in a secluded recess in one of the drawing-rooms. Dancing was still going on in the banquetting-hall, but since supper Louisa had been in attendance—generously supplying Miss Chester's place, as she gave Lady Athelston to understand—and had denied herself the society of her partners, just to spend an hour among those elders who had grown a little weary of the dancing, and had taken refuge here.

These two were in the midst of an energetic dialogue, which had been carried on in subdued

tones ever since they had been settled in this snug retreat.

"But of course, if you find, when you receive the answer to this second letter, that what I suspect is really true," Miss Castillain remarked, "you will at once dismiss Miss Chester; you can hardly do otherwise, can you, dear Lady Athelston?"

"I—I suppose not," she replied, not over-readily. "I suppose it will be necessary."

"It would be bad, even for the girl herself, to retain her in your service under those circumstances," remarked Miss Castillain charitably. "It would be bad even for the whole household. Think how every one in the county values your judgment, Lady Athelston, and then think how they would feel if they knew you had kept an impostor on as your companion. We cannot, indeed, afford to lose our confidence in you," concluded Louisa, with a bewitching smile; "we can afford almost anything better than that. And then think," she added, thoughtfully, "how bad it will be for Neil to have her in the house. There will surely be some unpleas-

antness. She will make mischief between him and Marjorie. Oh, of course you will judge it quite necessary to dismiss her at once."

And Lady Athelston, acting entirely under Louisa's influence now, as she must always act under the influence of some one, promised to do what Miss Castillain thought right, and owned that what Louisa proposed *would* be exactly right; but still a qualm hovered over her.

"Neil is so odd," she said; "he may be angry."

"He is odd," assented Louisa, with no sign of having cunningly brought the conversation round to this point; "therefore I think the safest and wisest thing for you to do would be to dismiss Miss Chester quietly, when Neil is away."

"Yes, that would be better," said Lady Athelston, as if the very anticipation of his absence were a relief.

"Then that is all arranged?" questioned Miss Castillain, with no evidence of being pleased herself, "and I am sure it is wisely planned. But, dear Lady Athelston, do promise me that when the letter comes you will show it to me

first—at any rate, that you will consult me before you send Miss Chester away.”

“Of course,” Lady Athelston answered, not at all pleased at the prospect contained in Louisa’s last five words; “of course, my dear, as you and Mr. Jelfrey have done it all for me, I shall consult you. The letter is to come to him; and, from all accounts, my dear, he will be more anxious to tell *you* first. Is that true?”

“I am sure, dear Lady Athelston,” replied Louisa, blushing and bridling, “he will never think of telling *that* even to me, until you are told.”

“Well, well,” remarked Lady Athelston, pleasantly, understanding the blushing and bridling, “he is a clever man, my dear, and handsome; still you ought to have looked higher.”

“But, you know,” whispered Louisa, repeating credulously one of her supposed lover’s deepest falsehoods, “he is only a tutor for a time, and by his own choice.”

The tutor, who was a tutor for a time and by

his own choice, had in the meantime found Lina Chester in the blue morning-room, where she had sat alone on her first arrival at High Athelston.

"Miss Chester," he said, leaning with his back against the centre table, and speaking with a coolness and ease which, to her, seemed the essence of insolence, "I am deputed by Sir Neil Athelston to bid you return to the ball-room."

"You?" questioned Lina, with a quiet self-possession which showed no sign of fear. "A strange ambassador even for him to choose."

"What on earth is the use of your avoiding Sir Neil as you do?" inquired Jelfrey, curiously studying the white figure and the pure face. "It offends you, I suppose, that he is said to be engaged to Miss Castillain. Rubbish!" sneered Jelfrey, excited by the thought. "He will never marry her; why, I can make you sure of that by a word!"

"Never mind," interposed Lina, with haughty coldness.

"Marjorie Castillain," he said, in a whisper which could not hide the passion of his voice,

"is too fond of some one else ever to marry Athelston ; does that satisfy you ?"

"I was not unsatisfied," remarked Lina, with quiet scorn. "What need have you to tell me this ?"

"No need," returned Jelfrey, with a quick sneer, "I don't know why I took the trouble to tell you. I came for another purpose. Miss Chester, I have in my room a letter from the lady who lives at 18, Berkeley Square, an answer to one Lady Athelston wrote making inquiries about the young lady who purported to have lived there as governess, and whose very flattering testimonial came from that address. That letter I give to Lady Athelston to-morrow, unless——"

No cry had escaped the girl's white lips ; no tears rose to the wide, startled eyes ; but the pause which followed his words seemed like an hour of agony to her.

"The writer, Miss Chester," he continued, breaking that awful pause at last, "ignores all knowledge of the Mrs. M'Mullen whose name you gave to Lady Athelston, except that (just

before last season) she left her house for a month in the charge of her dressmaker, whose name is M'Mullen, and who lived then in rooms in Conduit Street. She explains this politely. Considering that the letter sent to her house inquiring about a former governess could scarcely be intended for this dressmaker, she thought it best to answer it; for she opened it because the number was affixed; and she could not tell where to send it. When Lady Athelston has read this reply to her letter, she will, I am sure, either wish me to go to London to investigate this, or require you to leave here at once. Either of these things, though, can be prevented by your consenting to do exactly what I propose. Then, if there is any deception of which you fear discovery, you will escape it."

After his cold, calculating speech, Lina's passionate words fell like a cry.

"Why keep up this horrible veil between us even now?—now when you show yourself here to me alone in your own true colours? You know all that Lady Athelston will hear; all

that you yourself could find out for her if you went on purpose."

"But what I know need not be told to anyone," he said, avoiding unconsciously both the scorn and the fear which flashed from her beautiful eyes. "You know what I told you before, when—well, we need not recall that night. You know how you are to act towards Sir Neil; do you consent to that?"

"Never!" she answered, with slow distress.

"Then there is but one thing you can do," he said, deliberately; "you must go away—away from High Athelston entirely; and your—and that artist fellow in Nether Lane must go too; just as I said before. He must go promptly and quickly."

"I—cannot," faltered Lina. "Have you no pity? Where can I go? Where can he go? What harm can he do you—or anyone?"

"That must be done—or the letter shown," remarked Jelfrey, folding his arms complacently, and watching the quivering pain of the girl's face.

"I have always known you to be false and

cruel," she said, slowly. "I—I would rather he went away—homeless and suspected, as he must be—than that he were false and cruel as you are false and cruel."

"Then he is to go? That's right," Jelfrey said, ironically. "I thought that you, with your peculiar notions, would not stay here under false pretences, deceiving those who have kindly taken you in."

"Hush!" she cried. "There is no need for you to speak to me of this."

"Then what have you decided?" he asked. "I have no wish to stay here. I only wait to know how I am to act regarding that letter which I hold."

"Must I—must I decide to-night—alone—here—now?"

"I will not say that," he answered, with a gesture of easy concession. "You may think of it, if you like, until to-morrow—until to-morrow night. I will find means of receiving your answer. Leave all that to me. Only be prepared with it to-morrow night; and it must be decisive. It cannot, surely, be difficult to

choose between two definite plans ; either being dismissed with all your antecedents known, or going away freely, still believed in as the old lady has believed in you all along."

"That will do," said Lina, raising her hand involuntarily to stop him. "You have said enough. I will tell you my decision to-morrow."

"Then I will wait," he smiled. "And now good night."

These parting words Lina passed by, perhaps not even hearing them ; and then she left the pretty little room, which had suddenly grown hateful to her, and crept along the passages towards her own chamber, her face drooped in its unspeakable anguish.

Marjorie Castillain, in her search for Lina, came suddenly upon the small, white-clad figure, and read this unutterable anguish at a glance. Silently and tenderly she took the lonely girl to her warm and loving heart.

"My dear, my dear !" she whispered, and her eyes were wet once more with those big, rare tears of hers which did not fall, "never mind

it all, whatever it is. May I come to your room when I can leave them below? Oh! I wish I dare leave them now! I am so sick, so weary of it all!"

"Please, no—please, not to-night," said Lina, her lips twitching as she tried to speak without a sob. "Oh, I wish I could tell you! Oh, I should like to tell you—after—after to-morrow night!"

"Yes, dear," murmured Marjorie, soothingly, as she kissed the trembling lips again and again; "to-morrow night I shall come and fetch you to Hawkedale, or come and stay with you here, whichever you like, you poor little trembling child! Good night—good night."

Marjorie watched her walking on down the lighted corridor—so feebly and lingeringly—then turned and took her own way back to the ball-room, to be the gayest and prettiest figure in the gay and pretty scene.

"I ought not to wonder at any sorrow our engagement may bring (if that is it)," she whispered to herself, while she was still alone

and had no need to hide the sympathy upon her face. "I knew it from the beginning. The only truthful thing Neil did was to give me pearls in my betrothal-ring—pearls and tears, all one—and the only truthful thing I have done through these years has been to wear them.'

CHAPTER VI.

WAITING FOR THE DUSK.

IT was the morning after the ball at High Athelston, and Fitz Spendir sat at work in so much of the faint, cold sunshine as could find its way into the little cottage in Nether Lane. He was copying the painting which Colonel Stuart had ordered for Mrs. Esdaile, and Jet was in the garden, raking the soil, and "making the place look neat and nice," as he said. Suddenly the child ran in delightedly.

"Oh! dad," he cried, "Jack Esdaile's come on his pony to fetch me to go all through the valley to a farm-house on the other side the hills, and we're to ride in turns. Oh! father,

do let me go! And he's got lunch, and we're to be nearly all day."

Fitz was laughing at the excited, unconnected speech, when the bright little face of Jack Esdaile appeared at the door.

"Good morning, Mr. Spendir," he said. "I cannot come in because I have my pony here, and he will be spoiling Jet's borders if I leave him. Uncle Alick told me I was to stay here persuading you until you let Jet come with me. I have a holiday from now all day. I'm going to the Low Farm on an errand for mamma. Jet's quite well enough to come now; isn't he, Mr. Spendir? I won't let him get tired. He shall ride just all the way. Why, if I like, you know, I can ride behind him. You will let him come, Mr. Spendir?"

As if Fitz could have said "No," seeing the bright excitement of Jet's delicate face, and hearing the breathless whisper, "Let me go, dad!" As if he could have said "No," even if he had known what the end of that day was to be!

"Run in, laddie," he whispered, stooping with

his hand on the child's shoulder, "run in for your jacket."

Jack Esdaile heard the whisper, and with quick tact he turned to his pony.

"If you please, Mr. Spendir, I'll lead him down the garden again, and wait at the gate for Jet. I want to alter the stirrup leathers, too."

"That boy has just the thoughtful delicacy of his uncle," thought Fitz, going into the house again; "what a friend for my lad to have found! Well," he added aloud, as Jet came down the narrow stairs, busily forcing his arms into the tight sleeves of his "best jacket," "well, are you all right now? Bring me the brush."

So first he brushed the child's clothes, slowly and carefully. Then he parted his straight hair afresh, and brushed it up until it looked almost curly, as Jet said. Then he buttoned on a clean collar, and tied his faded tie into a peculiar knot which concealed the soiled parts.

"Capital!" exclaimed the artist, standing back and viewing him. "You look first-rate, Jet; but—but have you no gloves?"

"Father," whispered the child, timidly, "I lost those you bought me for church; I—I couldn't help it."

"There's a pretty state of affairs, then!" said Fitz, screwing up his mouth for a whistle of despair. "I do believe I'd sooner have found five shillings than heard that. What's to be done now?"

"Perhaps Jack hasn't any on," suggested the delinquent, hopefully.

"Famous idea!" cried the artist, in his genial good-humour. "Let's see—but cautiously."

So he stepped to the window on tip-toe, and looked out to where the boy (still courteous and patient) stood beside his pony.

"No," whispered Fitz, with a pirouette back into the room, "I believe he has none. Then it doesn't matter about you, does it, Jet?"

"It never mattered about me, dad," returned the boy, in his quiet, old-fashioned way. "I never mind that sort of thing with Jack; he never laughs at me."

Fitz Spendir's eyes darkened a little at this

speech. He knew that other children often laughed at his boy, and the thought was a hard one patiently to bear—though few could have told better than himself what the mocking of such lips was worth, and how slow the best and noblest are to pass their judgment on the little ones.

"Father," said Jet, catching this look upon the artist's face, "don't let me go. You'll be lonely, won't you, dad?"

"Not a bit," was the quick, laughing answer; "I shall be all right, and do a splendid day's work, as I shall not have you to hinder me. Mind you enjoy yourself as much as ever you can, for you don't often get a day's pleasure, laddie. Now run along."

He followed down the garden path, to watch the boys start.

"Don't be anxious about us, Mr. Spendir," said Jack, as he fixed Jet snugly on the saddle; "I'll take care of Jet; and I've got the lunch here, and we shall have something warm at the farm, and ride home through the valley, before it's dark."

"I will meet you there," Fitz said, "and bring Jet home. You will not need to ride round here again, Jack."

"Oh, Mr. Spendir, are you sure you can spare the time?"

"Quite sure; for it will be in the dusk. The walk will be a treat to me. I have a short cut from here to the waterfall, you know, and the round of the road will lengthen your ride greatly."

They said, "Good-bye" to each other, and parted; the boys laughing and chatting as they went on towards the town, and the artist thinking gratefully of Jack's uncle and mother, as he went back to his solitary task.

Not long had he been at his easel before the cottagedoor opened, and Lina Chester entered the room; a bright, glad smile upon her lips for him, whatever fear and pain were in her heart. But the story that she had come to tell must be told, and, though she delayed as long as she could, she told it at last. Told how (though she had stolen that letter, and Marjorie had rescued it, and he had burned it) a similar one had been sent afterwards safely and securely; told how

the answer to this letter had arrived, what that answer was, and all that Eustace Jelfrey had said to her when he told her that he had it in his possession.

And, as she spoke, Fitz Spendir, noting what sorrow and anxiety had done for the slight form before him, and looking on his own bare room, and cramped, impoverished life, saw two great wrongs far back in the buried years of which neither of them spoke; and all the strong and long-curbed passion of the man rose up in fierce rebellion against the laws of God as well as man. And Lina sat and trembled as she listened to the fierce, burning words, the truth of which she felt that moment almost as he felt it.

"The viper!" sneered Fitz, his lips tight upon his teeth, and his handsome eyes (which an hour before had looked so pitifully and so tenderly upon the child) flaming now in their hot, wrathful scorn. "The viper! When again and again I have known him to be listening and watching, why have I not slain him as I should have slain any other poisonous reptile? Do you call that Heaven's justice? Then let

Heaven's justice go, and give me devilry—devilry like his, which prospers and wins its way!”

“But we don't see the end yet,” said Lina, softly.

“There won't be long to wait now,” he answered, as he walked angrily to and fro in the small room. “The end is hurrying, for I have lost the power at last of resisting what I have resisted so long.”

“Of resisting,” she said, piteously, appealing to him with both her hands outstretched, and her face full of deep, appealing love, “the sin which would make us his equals! O God, pity us, that we both die before that time!”

The anguish of her face, and the beseeching attitude, went straight to the man's heart, and stirred it with its old patient, brave forbearance.

“Dear,” he whispered, the strong brown hands unclenched, and the fierce fire dying in his eyes, “do not look at me so. I was not master of myself just now,—as I may not be

master of myself when I meet him. But you have brought me to myself again. Sit down. You look so small and frail to-day, while my strength seems like that of half a dozen men. Did you sleep or rest at all last night?"

"How could I, when he had told me this?"

Then, in his great pity and affection, the artist took her close within his arms, and, on his breast, she sobbed until she was quiet in utter weariness. And now he was the comforter, gentle and patient in his strong and quiet courage, lifting a little this cloud which hung above them both.

"Lina, it will be best for everyone that we should go; even though by doing so we must show our fear of him."

"Perhaps, if *I* went," she said, "you need not. It would be cruel for you to go when you are busy here."

"And being cruel," he answered, in his fitful scorn, "of course it is his first condition. I think that is his chief wish—that I should disappear, with all suspicion resting on me. But

I never will go, and leave *you* here to bear all that, among them, they have made *you* bear."

"They cannot harm me by that," she said, softly stroking the dark face with her hand, "not if the truth were not known; but it *will* be, it *is* to be, unless we both go."

"And if we go," he said, with rigid lips, "he will know that we go to avoid his threats, and to carry out his dastardly conditions. Now, too," he murmured, his brows drawn low over his restless eyes, "when I was getting on."

"Is it growing into a large sum?" she asked, with a wistful smile.

"Not very rapidly," he answered, with a short, hard laugh; "but still it is growing, and I am strong and able, and the years are long. Yet the sum is great to me. The master over there at High Athelston, with a stroke of his pen, could——"

"Hush! hush!" cried Lina, her eyes fixed upon his lips in breathless pain.

"Why?" he asked. "I was only thinking how *he* could never want a thousand pounds, and how little he valued it; and—and how little

he could imagine how long it takes to earn and save it."

"My efforts, too, are all foiled now," said Lina sadly. "I was so glad to think that every year I should earn one hundred pounds, saving always eighty, and sometimes more. What will be the interest of that thousand pounds for—for these five years?"

"Never mind, dear," he cried, hastily, as he bent to kiss the piteous lips; "don't think of it ever again."

"Let us look our future in the face, just once, quite steadily," she said, after a little pause. If you go now, leaving your work half finished, what will Colonel Stuart think; after having always been so kind?"

"Always," Fitz assented, "always; and he will suspect me of the very worst and basest ingratitude of which a man is capable, as well as of countless former sins. Cheerful prospect! Go on."

"And Miss Marjorie Castillain has been kind too—to both of us."

"Kind!" he echoed, a deep, sudden brightness

in his eyes, "rather a rare sort of kindness, hers! Well, never mind; we can still just say 'God bless her!' when the memory of her brings a thought that's almost like a prayer. I never hoped to be able to do more than that. I can do that as well when I am homeless, as I can now—as well even as if I were master over there, where she is to live. Don't talk about *her* any more. Go on."

"I think if we do go away," mused Lina, "that still the truth may be discovered, I mean may be told."

"Would he lie so far as that?" exclaimed Fitz, with hasty passion.

"He may. I never can believe him now; and a clue like this, when once begun, is easily followed. What shall we do?"

"You may well ask," he said; "but who can answer? Need we decide now?"

"No, I have not to give the answer until night," she answered, clutching at the thought of even a slight reprieve. "Shall we think of it until evening? I will come here again this evening. I can most easily indeed, for Lady Athelston is

spending the day at Burton Park. I shall have nothing to do. Let me come again, and hear what you have thought."

"But," said Fitz, with a sudden recollection, "I have promised to go down the valley at dusk, to meet the boys, and to bring Jet home."

"Is he with Jack Esdaile?" inquired Lina, hurriedly.

"Yes, they have ridden together to the Low Farm, and are coming home by the ravine."

"And you are to meet them?" she said. "Oh, I am so sorry, because Colonel Stuart asked Mr. Jelfrey to go up the valley at dusk, to walk home with Jack. I heard him say it last night at High Athelston, because he should be out this morning, he said, and might forget. Oh, I do so wish you would not go."

"But I have promised," laughed Fitz, carelessly. "Besides, dear, why should that prevent me?" But, though he asked the question, he knew all that she meant.

"I shall come this afternoon," she whispered, "and, if you are gone, I shall follow you. I know the short way behind these houses to the

waterfall. I—I wish you would not go until I have been here and spoken to you.”

“I shall, most probably, be back before you come,” he answered, cheerily. “I can think things over better and more clearly as I walk alone; the habit has grown upon me, and you know that it was always there. Are you really going now?”

She had risen and moved from the fire, where she had been sitting; but, instead of going to the door, she lingered, looking at that little coloured sketch which had so strongly attracted her, on her first visit to the cottage.

The old church-porch, the broken sun-dial, and the one grave by itself in the churchyard-path, with the simple name painted so plainly—all these riveted her eyes in a wide, sad gaze; and the artist (who had quietly come up behind her, and was looking on it too) put his arm softly about her, as if something in the picture, or its memories, drew those two together all the closer.

It was a silent embrace, telling much of a strong, protecting love on his side, and a cling-

ing one on hers; and often and often she was glad to recall it.

"Shall we ever find the spot?" she mused, in a slow, wondering tone.

"I mean to find it," he answered, with the quiet, fixed determination of a strong, undaunted man.

And then she said,

"Good-bye. You will think what will be the best; think deeply, won't you—and prayerfully?"

"Yes, if I can," he answered, hesitating over the promise.

So she went; and he, left alone once more, sat down to his painting, as on any other day. At dinner-time he left his easel, and, walking up and down the room a little, wondered what it would be best to do.

Thoughts would not shape themselves properly, so, setting them aside, he brought out the bread and cheese and took his dinner. Then he went back to his work, and never paused until his watch hand pointed to four, when he laid aside his palette and brushes, locked the cot-

tage door behind him, and walked, swiftly and firmly, as he always walked, over the fields towards the valley.

And so the hours had passed, and this had been to him as any ordinary day, so far as others could see; though Dorcas said afterwards that she had noticed for the first time that no sound of whistling or singing came from the artist's room that day. But what did *that* tell of baffled hopes, or the shattering of a life-long ambition?

And Lina went back to High Athelston, wondering how she should spend the long, solitary hours. She knew Sir Neil was at home, and she knew why he stayed at home; but she had avoided him so far, and knew how she could do so as she re-entered the house. Once safely in her own room, she would remain there until the dusk, when she would go back to the cottage.

Margaret had put a fire in her room; and, tired and sad, she sat down before it and began to think. *Began* to think! Had she ceased thinking for one moment through many weary hours? How would Eustace Jelfrey

manage to see her to-night? If they decided to leave Highshire, how long a time would he allow them before——? These thoughts, always the same, and bringing no answer, would never do. She drew her hand wearily across her forehead.

“I will leave it to him,” she said; “he will see it more clearly than I can. I will do exactly what he says.”

Then she sat silent, and tried to think of nothing; until, finding that impossible, she rose and went to a small box that stood beside her bed. From this she took a worn-looking brown book, and, with it in her hand, returned to sit beside the fire. There were no letters on the cover of the book, but on the first page was written:

“MAGDALEN’S DIARY.”

Lina’s eyes were bright and restless as she turned the leaves. Then, finding her place almost in the middle of the book, she began to read. Twice Margaret came to the door to offer to help her, or to replenish

the fire, or to bring refreshment; but each time she was gently and quietly denied admission. Sir Neil sent to summon Miss Chester to luncheon, but his message, too, was unheeded. Lying quite still in her low, white chair, she read on in silence, page after page; sometimes going back to re-read, and sometimes passing whole paragraphs unnoticed. Through all the long hours, while she waited for the dusk, she held the brown book in her lap; and followed, with wide, sad, dreamy eyes, the words which she herself had written there in the past years.

And this was what she read :

CHAPTER VII.

MAGDALEN'S DIARY.

OUR last night at home—Gerard's and mine. We have been together to the Scilly Isles to-day, by way of keeping our twenty-first birthday; and in the beautiful Abbey gardens we planned and promised for the life we are to lead together. What happy hours we spent in the loveliness and the solitude there! Will such ever come again?

Now that the Autumn day is over, we linger with Aunt Jessie as long as we can, round the great fire in the front kitchen; hardly hearing a sound of the noisy gusts of wind that shake the old laburnums outside the wide window, and rattle their branches

against the panes. Hardly a sound, because we are listening with all our ears and hearts to Aunt Jessie's low, subdued voice, as she tells us (for the first time to-night) the story of our lives—my twin brother, Gerard's, and mine. It is one of the rare nights that grandfather spends from home, so rare that I can only remember five or six of them through all my childhood and girlhood. I don't know what brings the talk round to the very question which Gerard and I have so often wondered over, and so often wanted to hear answered; I suppose we drift into it from talking of grandfather, and of our going away to-morrow from the old Cornish home.

Thinking it all over again now, alone in my room, I recall, as if I saw it still, Aunt Jessie's tired brown face, with the love and the gentleness creeping into her eyes, every now and then, as they meet Gerard's through the story of wrong which he is hearing for the first time, and which may well stir to its depths a warm, proud, generous heart like his. Not but what Aunt Jessie's eyes

always do soften a little when they rest on Gerard, however cold and hard they may be to meet mine. But I will say no word to-night of her indifference to me—no, not a word on this last night. In the dim future, which I cannot see, who can tell whether her love may not seem to me a vanished blessing? At any rate, I will think now only of her care for the orphan children, and her real, real love for one of them. And, oh! I hope that when the old farm knows us no more, her memory, even of me, may be tender; what her memory of Gerard will be, I know full well.

Aunt Jessie is not our aunt exactly, though we always call her so. She is grandfather's sister; so that she is, in reality, our great-aunt. But that does not make any difference. She has been all that we have ever known of aunt, grandmother—even mother. But ah! not all that we *shall* know of mother. I think—and Gerard thinks, I know; for we often talk of it, we two, in the quiet Summer twilights, and the long Winter evenings—that

some day, beyond the Golden Gates, we shall know her. Oh! we shall know her—Gerard and I—no fear but that we shall know our own mother!

The last night! There is something sad in the thought now that it has come upon us, though we have been looking forward to it for so long. I suppose there always will be something sad about every last time, however bright the other beginning that may lie beyond. It fills my eyes with tears even to write the words, though my life has not been a full or a happy life in the old farm here. But I said I would not write of that.

To-night I know a reason for grandfather's stern and cruel-seeming neglect of us; I know a reason for Aunt Jessie's love for Gerard, and indifference to me; and many things are plainer to me.

I always thought that the reason she did not care to have me with her, either to help or keep her company, was that I never was clever in the farm work, never quick to understand it, or strong to perform it;

and I used to wish she had not sent me to the Rectory, to study there, because it caused me to be still less fit for my post here. Then she always liked household work, and I never could. Perhaps the feeling has been wrong; I have thought so, and struggled against it, but I have never been able to overcome it.

It has been much the same, too, with Gerard, only he is so different from me, that he would never shrink from any duty, however hard or uncongenial it might be to him—*never*. I know that never through the years to come shall I change this thought. I know that whatever paths lay before him, he would know instinctively, by reason of his clear, undeviating sense of honesty, in which his own straightforward course of duty lay, and that nothing would have power to turn him from it—no hardship, no hard work, no repulse. Oh! Gerard, my twin brother, how I wish I had your bright courage, and your trustful bravery, to help me, too, to walk uprightly in this new and untried path which lies before us!

We have always known that we were to leave Tresean when we were grown up and could make a home for ourselves; so grandfather's decision at last did not take us at all by surprise. What will the home be like, I wonder, that we are to make for ourselves—the home in the far city? Gerard was in London last week and has, in a sort of way, prepared for us. He has an engagement—a capital one, he calls it, though I cannot help hoping he will study painting, of which he is so fond, as well as sing every night;—and he has taken rooms for us in a house in Conduit Street; home-like in every way, as he describes them; but then I know how to allow for Gerard's pleasant exaggeration when he wishes to cheer me. And there, in the rooms in Conduit Street, I am to “keep house” (if that can be done in lodgings) for Gerard; and I might be wondering what it would be like, only that I know so well it must be a happy life for me, because it will be spent with him.

But, even while I am thinking of this, there is an undercurrent of thought resting on the

pitiful story of our mother's short and saddened life, and I will write it just as Aunt Jessie told it us to-night. We had been talking, as I said before, of our parting, and of grandfather, and Gerard said, in his outspoken way, that grandfather's worst sin was letting his sister work for him as she did, without the reward of loving thanks or tender care.

"But I like it, dear," insisted Aunt Jessie; "I've always lived in the old farm, you know, and always worked in it because I liked the work, as well as because I had it to do—liked it better than any other that could have fallen to me, and much better than doing nothing. So, Gerard, instead of being relieved if it were taken from me, I should be lost for occupation, and miserable indeed, dear."

"But it will be heavier still when we are gone, auntie," I said.

"Yes," she answered, absently, her eyes fixed upon Gerard, not upon me; "you lessen it for me much. But never mind; I shall never work harder than my strength will bear, and if I miss

your help, it will only make me think of you the more."

This was all said to Gerard, I knew, for she never said those things to me; but it was almost, if not quite, as pleasant for me to hear them said to him, as it would have been to have heard them said to me. I knew, as I said before, that I never was much real help to her, though I tried very hard. I think if she had loved me, or encouraged me, I might have succeeded better; but when she dismissed me indifferently, as she often did, how could I help wandering about the farm with only my own solitary dreams (I mean, of course, when Gerard was away) to bear me company? And what wonder that, under all these, there lay always, as there lies to-night, a deep, deep craving for something which my life has never known? Do other girls feel this want, I wonder? Do other girls have to fight passively with this same almost indefinable craving for a something missing from their lives? And through these solitary hours of mine there is always, too, a dreadful shrinking in my heart—a shrinking from the untried future

—which unnerves me terribly, and which I always dread Gerard seeing. Ah me ! it is strong and cruel within me to-night ; and even while I recall his bright, courageous anticipations, I can still only feel that fearful whispering in my own heart, that the future holds some vague, unusual sorrow for me and for Gerard. For Gerard ! I could bear it so much more lightly if I did not feel that through our sorrow, however deep, however keen, we must be together to suffer (even though half the world should part us) as (in all happiness that we may ever know) we must be together to rejoice.

But what was I telling of? Our talk to-night. I will not wander off again with that old habit of mine ; that is why I think it would be best to give up keeping a diary.

“ But, Aunt Jessie,” Gerard said, “ you will need no reminder of us, I hope, as we shall never need a reminder of you ; and the least that grandfather can do, after we are gone, is to make everything lighter and pleasanter for you. Perhaps he will condescend to do so. Magda-

len, I wonder how often he deigns to speak to you or to me during a year."

"Gerard, there is a little excuse for him," Aunt Jessie said; "and I am going, to-night, to tell you what that excuse is."

"I wish, some day," Gerard said, his eyes bright and proud, "I could have grand-children of my own, if only to have the benefit of profiting by his example. Oh! what a different grandfather one can fancy! Aunt Jessie, I shall never be able to forget how he clouded and deadened every bright and sociable thought I had as a child. Isn't it a woeful mistake to fancy that children don't feel the want of sympathy in their elders? But—but I don't suppose I ever shall have children or grand-children of my own, yet if I *had* the training of a child, my own life would have given me a lesson, Aunt Jessie."

Silly to put down these words, but that they were a part of this last night's talk of ours—so earnest, so very earnest, in spite of all our efforts to be light-hearted.

And then it was that Aunt Jessie told us the

story of our mother's life. And I remember it all so clearly and distinctly—as of course I should—that I can write it just as she told it to us, sitting so still beside the great wood fire, and laying now and then her small, hard hand upon my brother's as she quietly and shyly looked up into his handsome face, as if appealing for his patience and his forbearance to his grandfather.

“He was not always stern and moody as he is now, dear, though he always was—even from a boy—silent, and gloomy-tempered. I, who have lived with him all his life, ought to know him, oughtn't I? Yet I don't feel as if I did, even yet—nor as if I ever should. He married as pretty a girl as any in the county, though he was grave enough even then, when he was wooing her, taciturn, as I have so often heard him called. But he won her, and easily, too; for (as you can see now) he was a man in twenty for his face and figure. Like—a little, only a little like—you, Gerard; tall and strong and upright as you are; but it is his child's beauty that you

really inherit, dear—his only child's. And she *was* very beautiful, at least in the eyes of all of us who loved her. I don't think she was what is called really beautiful—not as"—Aunt Jessie glanced across at me here, for the first time, then was silent for a moment, checking the words that had risen to her lips—"but she was wonderfully pretty, and winning in every way. She had happy eyes, with coaxing laughter in them, and bright, funny words to say to all—just like Gerard; and no wonder, was it, that her mother's heart was wrapped in her, and that her father's pride in her grew with her growth? She had a way of running and singing about the house like a child, as glad and gay as if young brothers and sisters had been growing up with her here in the solitary farm, where hardly another young voice ever echoed, and hardly another young footstep ever trod.

"So, being what she was, was it any wonder that the farm felt like a prison—to the mother I often thought it must have felt like a terrible grave—after she was gone? Never mind how the news first came to us that she had left her

home and us—that is not a night which I dare live over again, even after two and twenty years. We knew it, and you may fancy what darkness fell upon us all in one sudden moment, a darkness of vague fear, of unwhispered shame, as well as the despair of seeing our idol—and our faith, too, with it—shattered on the hearth which had been all our world.

“He had been in the neighbourhood for some weeks, for the sake of the fishing; but he had been no more to us than other gentlemen who would come and stay at the village inn for a week or a month at a time in the fishing season. We all knew him by sight and name, but that was all. We knew nothing, until afterwards, of how he haunted the farm after he had once seen your mother, and of how she met him day after day in the little wood beside the river, to hear him plead for a consent which had been given before we knew of this. It is no use my telling you of the parting kisses which she took from us that night, we all unconscious that they were so. When you are able to think calmly

of that time, all those things will seem plain to you.

“After that day her mother went about the farm as if she had been in a dream; a long, gloomy dream, from which now and then she woke with a start, only to fall back into it again when her husband’s harsh words had ceased to rouse her. For he was harsh then, Gerard dear; and was there not reason and excuse for him?

“And so a little more than a year went on, and then we noticed a change in your grandmother. She would shake and flush at every sound, would start and give a little involuntary cry if her husband spoke suddenly to her; and she seemed to be for ever listening for something apart from any sound in the house which we could hear. I noticed this change for some time before Hiram did, for he was just as slow then to observe the people about him as he is now, though never so hard and cold—I would have you know that of your grandfather, Gerard dear. But I could not win her to tell me why it was. From that night of May’s

flight—we shortened your mother's name to May, though we have never shortened yours, Magdalen—she seemed to shrink a little both from your grandfather and myself; but ten times more so after there came upon her this change I tell you of.

“One night—it was a late Summer night, and the rain was falling and the wind was high—your grandfather came home unexpectedly. He had gone to a cattle-show at a distance, and had arranged to stay all night; and when he came, wet and tired, straight into the kitchen here, where I sat alone at my sewing, I knew in a moment, as plain as if somebody had told me, that there was some trouble behind him which I couldn't see yet.

“‘Where's Mary?’ he asked, so sharply that the answer would not at first come to my lips.

“‘Out in the village,’ I said, at last, speaking as naturally as I could. ‘She said she was going to see the poor old woman at the toll-house.’

“‘Down the river-lane won't lead her to the toll-house,’ he said, very roughly. ‘There's on-

ly the keeper's cottage through the wood, and there's nobody sick to go and see *there*.'

"And then he turned away, and went out again into the rain, in his best clothes and hat, just as he was. So frightened his words had made me—though I couldn't have told why—that I caught up a shawl and followed him. I didn't mind the rain either; I don't remember that I even felt it. I overtook him before he had reached the outer gate, but he didn't speak a word to me—not even to ask me what I wanted—as we walked on together.

"Well, we reached the keeper's cottage, and walked straight in without rapping. I never knew your grandfather do such a thing before, but he did it without hesitation that night, I following him into the shelter and the fire-light, with my heart beating almost aloud. There, before the fire, on a low rocking-chair, sat your grandmother, and on her lap you lay, Gerard, wide-awake and laughing; while in a cradle at her feet, Magdalen lay sleeping.

"Shall I ever forget what those first few

minutes were like to all of us—to me in my surprise and fear, to Mary in her pitying love and her timidity, to Hiram in his awful anger? We can never, any of us, live through that hour again, thank God!

“Gerard, your mother lay there dying in the room beyond us, and her father would not see her. I need not tell you what he said. With cruel words still ringing from his lips, he went away at last, and I went with him—even in his wrath, it came most naturally to me to follow him—but when he was silent in his room, and all the house was still for the night, I stole back to the keeper’s cottage; and the keeper’s wife let me quietly in, that I might be with May when she died.

“Gerard, standing there and listening to her words that night, uttered, when she knew that the next she uttered would be before the Judgment Seat, I knew that Sir Gerard Athelston had married her on the morning after that long Summer night-journey which they took together while we were searching for her and crying for her here in the old farm. But how could she

prove it, or how could we prove it, when she did not know where they had stopped, and so could tell neither the name of the church where they had been married, nor the name of the clergyman who had married them?

“Sleeping or waking, speaking in gleams of consciousness or in feverish ramblings, she always said the same things. And this was all. They had travelled all that night, fresh horses awaiting them constantly, and his servant taking the hired carriage back, she supposed, from the village where they stopped at last, and where everything was prepared for their marriage; other servants waiting there with a private travelling carriage. She never asked the name of the village; in her shyness and bewilderment she never thought to do this; and months afterwards, when Sir Gerard denied the marriage—telling her it was but a sham one to quiet her scruples, and to satisfy her that he had kept his promise to her—she had no proof to bring, as she could never have.

“Poor child! with what anxious, frightened eagerness she would describe all she remembered of the church, again and again; as if we,

who had lived here all our lives, could know this village, which lay at the distance of a twelve hours' rapid drive! But still she never ceased reminding us how there was a deep old porch to the church door, and a bent cross above it; and she told us how, as she came out of its shadow, she stepped upon a low stone grave which bore her own name, and two lines which struck her sadly and drearily then, but had often comforted her since, and which she could never forget. They were only these—

*'This simple stone shall bear a simple line—
Here lies a sinner saved by grace Divine.'*

“And that was all she knew of the church, except that from the gate where they stood a few moments waiting for the carriage, Sir Gerard had turned back laughingly to read the time on an old grass-grown sun-dial near the churchyard wall. This was all she could remember, and this, as I said, she told again and again; breaking off sometimes to plead with Sir Gerard to make their marriage known, and sometimes to whisper to her babies, with a pity which it was sad to hear upon a mother's lips, but still al-

ways going back to the one subject, and always clear and exact in that.

“It was in the early morning that she died, and then her mother came up here and pleaded with Hiram to have her brought home with her twin babies. But no; it was of no use. She was buried quietly from the keeper’s cottage in the wood, with no name upon her grave—I will show it to you before you leave to-morrow—and, after that, your grandfather allowed that you should come here. Yet, from the day that Mary brought you here until she herself died, some long months afterwards, he hardly spoke to her. Her care of you, or her re-union with her daughter, seemed to have put an impassable barrier between them, which neither could throw down; which, perhaps, only death itself could have removed, and so it may have been that death came in pity.

“Gerard, after she was dead, the love that had been buried in anger for so long, awoke in all its strength. I heard him moaning over her, and calling to her piteously by all the old pet names; but they could not move her then,

as they would have moved her if they had been uttered a few hours sooner.

"After that, we two lived on together here; and you grew up with us, brightening the old house for me, but never for him. The very sight of you always made him more cold and stern; the very sound of your voices deadened his voice, or roused it to harshness and impatience. So the time has gone on, and the year that he has always fixed for you to leave here, has come. Gerard, you mustn't harbour ill-will against him, even if, at the last moment, he will not bid 'God bless you!'"

"I can never harbour ill-will against him, save for my mother's sake and Magdalen's," replied Gerard, in such a gentle voice that I knew where his thoughts were lingering. "Aunt Jessie, do you think he has ever tried to find that church?"

"I believe," she answered, very low, "that he has been to seek it many times; but he never told me, and I never dared to ask. I'm sure," she added, as if appealing for him to his grandson, "that he longed to believe in his daughter's

marriage, but could not. He is too proud to own this, yet I feel quite sure of it. And often I feel how hard it is to wonder at this—putting myself in his place. There was May's word; but then for a year he had lost the May who had been his truthful, innocent child; and to doubt *your mother's* truth was not what it would have been, a year before, to doubt the word of his own home-child. Can you understand this?"

"Aunt Jessie, *you* never doubted her truth?" asked Gerard, with proud impatience glancing through all his gentleness.

"Never, dear; but we women are different in our judgments. Then, as I was going to say, besides that, what dependance could he have on the honour of Sir Gerard Athelston? The honour of the Athelstons is held but of slack worth in their own county; and even *we* could hear all this when our child was gone. It is an unprincipled and dissolute race, Gerard, and your father was the worst of all his line."

"Aunt Jessie, is he living still?" I asked.

"No; he married again a week or two after your mother's death—whether he had waited

for that, or whether he had not heard of it, I do not know—and died abroad while on his wedding tour. The next heir married his rich young widow. I have heard nothing more of them since then, and I wish to hear nothing more.”

“I’m glad he is dead,” said Gerard, sternly, “for I never should have thought it harm to harbour ill-will against *him*. What was he like?”

Perhaps it was because the question was so sudden that Aunt Jessie started, and her eyes fell by chance upon me, with an angry look in them, which, for the moment, reminded me of grandfather, as he, too, will look at me sometimes—only very, very rarely will he look at me at all.

“He was—like Magdalen,” she said, hesitating over the words.

“No, auntie,” put in Gerard, in his bright, quick way, “he never could have really been like Magdalen. No man’s face could have been small and fair and exquisitely beautiful like hers.”

I write these words because they were Gerard’s.

"Yet she is very like him," Aunt Jessie said, quite coldly. "He, too, had pale and delicate features—high-bred, as people used to call them—and he had those grave, gray eyes, which look intensely dark, as Magdalen's do. But, however handsome or high-born the Athelstons are—and they are both, beyond all doubt—it is not a likeness to be proud of, as she knows."

Yes, I knew it then, and I wished, with all my heart, that I had had a face which should have reminded them of my mother, and not of my father, whom even Gerard, from to-night, must hate so deeply and so honestly.

"I wonder whether any Athelston will ever redeem the name?" he mused, only half aloud.

"I don't think it likely," Aunt Jessie said.

"But," I interrupted, quickly, "Gerard is an Athelston, auntie."

She smiled sadly as she looked into his face.

"Better be only Gerard Dymocke, as they baptised you, dear," she said. "No Athelston will ever acknowledge you as one of them; and—

and, as I have said, it is not a name to be proud of."

"But I can raise it," Gerard said, so brightly and confidently that there came a stupid mist of tears between my eyes and his, as I listened. "Aunt Jessie," he added, after a pause, "I must find that village, and the church where our mother was married."—And now the loving ready confidence with which he spoke was good to hear.—"Not that I wish it for myself—I have nothing to prove to myself or to Magdalen—but I must find it, for grandfather's sake. If we had not been going to London——But it's best so," he broke off, laying a gentle hand upon my shoulder; "we could not part even for that little time, could we, Lina?" (his old pet name for me). "No; it is far best so."

I knew it was. I know it now as I write in my old room for the last time, spending so the long, wakeful hours which would creep by more slowly still if I were to go to bed. Tomorrow we start together out into the new world; and (though I know that it may hold

great disappointments and great sorrows for us both) yet I can echo Gerard's words, and say it is "Best so."

* * * * *

No. 7, Conduit Street.

We are quite settled in our town home now. Being with Gerard makes it really home to me; but at first it seemed very odd, after the old farm. On the floor above us, there lodge two people who have interested me from the first; a mother and daughter. They are only "simple folk," as Aunt Jessie would say, for the daughter works for her livelihood as a dress-maker in the great houses round here, being wonderfully clever with her needle, and thinking it a great pleasure—the greatest pleasure that could be given her—to earn, for her helpless mother, all the comforts she could wish. Yet it seems to me—I don't know much about London yet—but it seems to me that I may be grateful to have found, in this vast crowd of human hearts and faces (all seeming so far away from each other, even as they jostle in the crush), two simple, loving natures who have already learnt

to like and trust me. They always say it is "good of me," or "kind of me," to go up to their quiet, busy room ; but I think the goodness is *for* me, not *of* me ; and I would not wish for a truer comforter than Rachel M'Mullen would be, if I were ever in distress, and had not Gerard. Of course I mean if I had not Gerard. With him, what other comforter could I ever need ?

He seems very fond of his life here, and enjoys his night engagements greatly. Sometimes he takes me with him, but not often, because he either has to leave me alone, or with the one friend who is oftenest with him and whom I cannot like.

I wonder why it is ? I try with all my might to like him, because my brother does. I know he is gentlemanly, clever, agreeable, accomplished, and handsome ; yet I cannot like him. I suppose one has no power over that sort of feeling ; at any rate, I have none in this case. I cannot like Mr. Jelfrey, and I cannot explain why. Of course Gerard only laughs at me, in his gay, pleasant way ; but he takes care

that I shall not be dependent on Mr. Jelfrey for my evening's amusement when he himself cannot be with me.

Gerard's voice improves every day, and is making him quite famous. As he says, it is as good as a fortune to him; and I think, with Mr. Jelfrey, that the pathos of which it is capable is even of more worth to him than its rich quality. Sometimes Eustace Jelfrey says to him, laughingly, when he finds him singing here alone to me, that he ought to husband his resources, as they may desert him. But Gerald never heeds that advice.

"I'm too strong a man," he says, lightly, "to fear my voice failing from weakness, and too cool a man to fear any great emotion taking it from me. So don't let us think of a far-hence to-morrow."

"Suppose your voice *were* to leave you, Dymocke," Mr. Jelfrey said, one day, with unaccountable curiosity, "what should you do?"

"Go into the dressmaking with Lina," laughed Gerard. "What else could I do, man?"

"You can do something besides sing, surely?" he persisted. "What does he do all day, Miss Dymocke, when he isn't engaged at his profession, or rehearsing, or with me?"

And then I told him, I suppose for the first time, that what my brother was fondest of doing (after singing) was drawing; how, from a boy, he had delighted in it, though he had had no lessons, and was not supposed to have any real talent.

"Yes, I can attempt it," Gerard put in, dropping the conversation, "but that's all. Mine are but poor and lame attempts, Jelfrey, and, indeed, I haven't much time. My genius, old fellow, will leave the Thames unignited. Now I'm ready."

Then Gerard kissed me and went out. I wish he did not go out quite so often with Eustace Jelfrey; but I cannot bear to say this to him. It seems as if I fretted at being left; and if he thought that, he would never go. I like him to go—but not with Mr. Jelfrey.

Last night, when they went out together, and I wouldn't go because Eustace Jelfrey went, I grew so lonely here by myself, and so moody,

thinking that I ought to help Gerard in the maintenance of this home of ours, and the providing of that better and grander one which he delights to picture, that I determined to go up and sit for a while with Rachel and her mother. And I was soon cheerful again, there in the neat, bright room, with the patient mother who has been helpless for twenty years, and the brave, loving daughter who so gladly works for, and waits upon her. I am able sometimes to help Rachel in her work ; I was able then, and we sat and sewed together quite merrily. She praises me and says my taste is worth much to her ; but I know she only says it to make me believe that my going so often to them is no hindrance, as I often fear, but a help.

I suppose it was my speaking of her having no help in her work that put it into her head to tell me the sad little history of her adopted child. She had wanted to tell me for some time, she said ; and I knew why afterwards, when she came to Eustace Jelfrey's name.

Years ago, Rachel and her mother were stay-

ing for a month at the seaside, for the mother's sake (whom the paralysis had just then left helpless); and while they were there a circus entered the town, and the procession rode in state past their door. A little performer, a beautiful fairy-like girl riding alone in the midst, won Rachel's admiration. She smiled at her, and the child smiled in return; and at that very moment the horse shied and she fell.

Rachel did not quite understand how it was done; but in a few minutes the little girl lay on her bed, and the doctor had forbidden her to be moved. She won Rachel's heart entirely, and Rachel nursed her as willingly, if not so lovingly, as she was nursing her helpless mother. The child's recovery was very tedious, and the circus company were forced to leave the place without her. It was understood that she was to follow; but when she had recovered sufficiently to do so, she pleaded so hard for Rachel to keep her, that Rachel hadn't it in her heart to refuse, though she had many doubts that the girl would fret by-and-by, and chafe at the quiet of her life. But she

cried that she never could ; and so she stayed with Rachel, and was, as she said, her adopted child.

She had been called in the circus, Rosette ; but Rachel and her mother always called her Little Rose, even when she grew up. And Rachel says she was just like a little rose, and that they could never bear her to walk alone, even into the adjoining streets and squares where she would work. So Rachel nearly always went too, even though her time was valuable.

But one evening, Rose happened to be leaving a house in Hanover Square, when Eustace Jelfrey was leaving it too, and as it was raining, and she had no umbrella, and he had, he took her home, finding out, on the way, that she was going to the same place next morning. She laughed over the meeting as she told them of it that night ; but Rachel could not. The tears were thick in her eyes when she told me how, from that night, he wooed their little Rose ; how he married her ; then let her come home to them just to bid them good-bye, on

condition that she should then drop all connection with them.

And she had done so. Rachel has never seen her since, and that happened five years ago. She thinks she shall never see her again.

She sometimes meets Mr. Jelfrey and asks about her ; but he never deigns her a reply, only passes her with a bow. He does not know that Rachel lodges now above us. I wonder whether he would come here so often as he does, if he *did* know. I shall tell Gerard of this when I have a good opportunity ; I'm sure he ought to know.

I wonder whether the poor, pretty child to whom Rachel was so kind had any living relations in the world. Rachel says she used to talk about a mother whom she dimly remembered, but she did not even know that mother's name, and all that she possessed which could possibly lead to identification was an old gilded locket, with a twist of hair on either side, and under one, which was evidently a woman's hair, was written "Dorcas," and under the other, a man's short curl, was written.

“Jesse.” That was all, and how could that ever lead to the discovery of the girl’s parentage?

Rachel’s little story set me wondering. Is there any one now in the wide world, recalling longingly, and searching vainly for, the pretty child who was so grateful to those who rescued her from the life she could not bear? Is there any one who would grieve to think of her as Eustace Jelfrey’s wife; and would rather feel that the bright-faced child they had lost, was living even now that Life above, in which they can join her, than that she lives (a woman with a woman’s cares) a life here in which none of those, even who love her best, can participate? Ah me, how terribly, terribly lonely must be the life of a neglected or an unloved wife; because, if she is true and brave, she herself shuts out all sympathy.

It was after Rachel had told me this that I took courage to ask her what I have been long-ing to ask for some time—whether, among those she worked for, she knows anyone who wants a daily governess, and would be at all likely to engage me. She advised me to give up the

idea, as I guessed she would ; but I over-ruled all her objections, and then she could tell me that a lady in Upper Brook Street, to whose house she often goes to sew, is anxious, as she knows, to meet with some one who would go for a few hours every morning to read with her only daughter, who is too delicate for constant or hard study.

I was so glad to hear all this ; and this morning I called on Mrs. Esdaile. Even without a testimonial she engaged me—I suppose she would have been more particular if I had been going to live in the house—and then, after it was all decided, I told Gerard ; for I knew he would stop me if I let him know before. As it was, he seemed very much vexed at first ; but he got to laugh over it at last, as I did ; and we were discussing it quite merrily, when Mr. Jelfrey came in and took his own share in the talk, as usual.

He told us that Mr. Esdaile is one of the richest merchants in London ; that my pupil Clara is his only daughter, and that his son is living in Valparaiso with his wife and one little

boy, who will inherit immense wealth. He, too, asserted that it would not be right for me to go alone to and fro even this short distance; and Gerard gravely said that he should always take and fetch me.

So it ended all right, and in a few days I begin my new duties, and shall be very glad.

I told Gerard to-night of Rachel's adopted child, and he heard me very silently; man-like, he did not interrupt me even to give utterance to any wrathful words against Eustace Jelfrey. He says, in his warm generous way, that he will find her out if she is alive; and I know he never says those things without meaning them. But how can he do this? I remind him of the many things he has given himself to find out and put right.

"I have my life before me," he says, laughing; "wait and see."

* * * * *

I have been for a whole term at my daily duties in Upper Brook Street, and to-day I have left off for a month's holiday. I like Clara Esdaile very much, and the teaching is not at

all difficult to me ; yet how glad I was to think of the holiday ; and how proud I was to bring home to Gerard my first earnings ! He did so laugh when I showed him Mr. Esdaile's cheque ; and he told me to have it framed, for that it could not possibly be spent like an every-day sum of money.

"Besides," he said, "I shall be jealous, dear, if you spend it for anything which my earnings can buy you."

So I laughed then, for this first cheque of mine has always been destined for a present for Gerard, who is so generous to me, and who will not let me think that the money which I earn is for anything but extra and totally unnecessary amusements.

While we were joking about this cheque, Mr. Jelfrey came in, unannounced as usual, and he joined in the merriment.

"It may be awkward for you if you wish to spend it at once and personally," he said, with thoughtfulness. "Shall I change it for you?"

I was glad, and accepted the offer at once, though Gerard still laughed, and said that such a

valuable curiosity as that cheque never ought to be changed. So Mr. Jelfrey cashed it for me, and to-morrow morning I shall go to buy Gerard's present. As I came to bed, I went in and told Rachel of my cheque, and she looked sorry that I had let Eustace Jelfrey have it. I wonder why.

* * * * *

The holidays are over, and I begin work again to-morrow. I am not sorry to do so, though Gerard is strangely anxious—gravely anxious now, not laughingly so, as he was before—that I should give up teaching Clara any more. Gerard is more prosperous than he has been at all. He has an increase of engagements and an increase of fame; but I think the chief reason of his having more money, which still he always wishes to spend on me, is that he is seldom with Eustace Jelfrey now. Mr. Jelfrey comes here almost as he used to do, and is even gayer, I think, than he used to be; but somehow I cannot help fancying that Gerald is much less gay.

Sometimes he is even moody and impatient with me—Gerard, who, all his life, had been so brightly happy; so dauntlessly happy through every cold repulse and disappointment of our old life. I never ask him whether he has any sorrow in which I cannot share, partly because I dread the idea too much even to utter it, partly because I could not bear to see his face pale suddenly as I saw it pale a few days ago, when for a moment he misunderstood a question I asked him, and fancied it such a question as this. Perhaps in a few days' time he will be my own bright, loving Gerard once again.

* * * * *

Gerard was later than I had ever known him to be, and I sat wondering and wondering. I could not go up to Rachel, though I longed for the sound of some unharassed voice, and the sight of an unanxious face. I could not go, for I dreaded her seeing my own frightened face, and asking me questions which I could not answer. Oh, how I listened for Gerard's footstep on the pavement below! I felt—so keenly was

I listening—that miles away I could have distinguished his step upon the flags.

I was standing against the window behind the drawn blind, listening and listening with every power I possessed, when Rachel came quietly into the room. I do not remember her ever having done so before, and I am sure I looked surprised; though I was vexed afterwards that I had done so. She came to ask me to go and sit with them, she said, but I could see that she had other words in her heart, though they would not rise to her lips—other thoughts, perhaps, which I can understand better now. I told her I could not go, though, when she asked me why, I had no words to explain.

“Mother is restless to-night, dear,” she said, turning regretfully, “or I would stay here a little, for I’m tired of my own company upstairs. Somehow,” she went on, nervously, so anxious that I should not think she had sought me out for my own sake, though I knew so well that she had, “mother doesn’t care to talk, and the silence seems oppressive to me to-night.”

But I could not go with her. So she kissed me and left me, with a few words of comfort, which were, I dare say, common-place enough; yet of untold help to me just then.

And then the night wore on, hour after hour, until two o'clock had struck. I was not standing at the window then. I was sitting, oh, so tired! before the fire, which I kept burning cheerily all the while for Gérard. My head was buried in my hands, when suddenly a sound roused me. I started up, quivering in every limb, and waited for the sound again. It came, the tapping of some light substance against the window-panes.

I opened the dark curtains, and drew them close behind me to shut in the firelight; then I raised the blind, opened the window softly, and looked down into the street. At a little distance, a man's figure was sauntering along the pavement. I stood there waiting breathlessly for him to turn again. There was no other figure in all the street, and so I knew that it was for him I waited, and the moments seemed like hours.

"No sound of coming footsteps yet ; a long, long, quiet, horrible pause ; and then—and then the same dark figure coming slowly back again ; walking in the middle of the street, straight on, without looking up, until it stopped exactly opposite the window where I stood.

"Magdalen !"

The call was almost a whisper, but it pierced my ears like a cry of distress.

"Here—here I am, Gerard."

"Hush ! Put your hands through and catch what I am going to throw, but don't speak."

I felt that my heart had ceased its beating. I felt that with one cry I must fall down, nerveless and powerless, at Gerard's feet ; but his strange, awed whisper gave me a new strength, born of my terrible dread. I held my two hands through the window, and then, for the first time, he looked up—looked up with a long, steadfast, anxious gaze, which I could see, though his face was muffled and the lights were dim. Then he raised his right hand—in which I could see he held something dark—and took aim, slowly and deliberately. A true aim I

knew that Gerard could always take, and my hands were ready. A light throw, quick and steady, and my brother's pocket-book was clasped securely in my trembling fingers.

"Shut down the window, quick!" he whispered.

And then he was gone. No explanation; no farewell; no words but those; and Gerard was gone, and all the world was blank and bare and dark to me. Yet, quite cautiously, I could shut the window, draw down the blind, and close the curtains again.

After I had passed back into the fire-light, I opened the pocket-book in tremulous haste, and found it contained only one packet—a packet of money in gold and silver—and on the paper in which the coins were wrapped, some written lines, half of them blotted over. I knew the writing to be Gerard's, though it did not look like any which I had ever seen of his before; so I knelt down and read it eagerly and rapidly in the firelight, my breath hardly stirring as I did so, and the paper shaking in my hand. This was all:—

“Magdalen dearest, it will be best for you to leave here as quickly as you can. Can you go back to the farm, or can you——? Oh! how can I advise? I dare only leave it to your own guileless nature, and trust you to our God. I shall dare everything to leave you this. I dare even the terrible chance of making you a forced witness against your brother. My darling, escape that if you can. In the hope that you have done so, I must live till Heaven grants me news of you. Nothing can save me, at the dock, Lina, if I once reach it. The forged cheque was offered by me. Will any jury hesitate? Only you, in all the world, will believe in my innocence. A month ago——”

But the remaining words were blotted out, and I could not stay even to try to decipher them. I seemed to know what they would be if I could see them; and did *I* need to be told of Gerard's innocence?

There were no farewell words and no signature, but what need of them for me? I hid the paper in my breast, close and secure; then I

dressed, swiftly and silently, and for one moment crept into Rachel's room.

She was sleeping beside her mother, quiet and peaceful, and a wicked envy came over me as I gazed into her face. I left a light kiss on her cheek, and then raised my head slowly and stole from the room. I had caught sight of my own face once in the glass, and it had frightened me even more than the other sight had frightened me to-night. It was always white and small, and almost always anxious-looking, but now my eyes were wide and burning, and my face was weird in its pallor.

I think my footfall made no sound at all, as I stole down the stairs. The outer door had been left unbolted for Gerard, so I drew back the latch steadily and noiselessly, and left the house. The door was fast again behind me, and I was out in the sleeping street, alone in the night and the solitude.

Oh! what a longing I had to find Gerard! Oh, how I prayed I might overtake him by chance; for I knew, by an incomprehensible instinct, that I must not seek him. Was he

near me in the gloom ? Was he near me in the great loneliness ?

Praying breathlessly that I might find him ; then breaking off to pray that I might *not* find him if it would be less safe for him ; then crying to myself, "What shall I do ?" I went on. Shrinking into the deepest gloom that the streets held, and trembling so that often I had to stop to keep myself from falling, I went on to find a hiding-place ; sobbing always, noiselessly and tearlessly, for Gerard.

CHAPTER VIII.

END OF MAGDALEN'S DIARY.

AT home at the old farm once more ; but, oh ! how different it is without Gerard ! I used to think it gloomy always, but never guessed what it could be without my brother. Three days I have been here ; three weary, interminable days. Can I have many more to bear, with this awful doubt and anxiety about Gerard ?

Grandfather has not spoken to me since I came, and even Aunt Jessie avoids me ; so I wander alone through the short wintry days, and sit alone in the dark in my own room through the long hours of the Winter evenings,

shrinking from the light in the rooms below, as I feel that I must shrink from the light for evermore.

Oh! if I could but hear of Gerard! If I could but know where he is, that I might just be with him in my thoughts! Sometimes I try to speak of him to Aunt Jessie, but she always turns the subject aside with a shudder. Still I know, through all, that she does not think her favourite guilty of this great crime.

I see by the papers that the police are searching for him. They came here on the very first morning, Aunt Jessie says, so surely they will not come again. Yet she seems as if she ever expected them. Oh! if I did but know that he was safe!—if I could only feel as sure that he is safe as I feel sure that he is innocent!

And so, hour after hour, I wander where he and I used to wander together. I have tried to go into the old outhouse in that dismal hollow near the cliffs, just because, when we were very little, we used to hide there from grandfather, when he was unusually stern. But it is kept

locked now, and I dare not ask for the key, though I know there is no necessity for locking up the wretched old place.

Last night, in the clear moonlight, I strolled there—in my restlessness I am perpetually strolling somewhere—and, as I could not go in, I stood leaning against the door, looking at the sad, moonlit sea, and wondering (as I never cease to wonder) where Gerard can be; wondering, too, whether I shall soon be summoned to tell all that I know of his flight, and whether he lets me know so little on purpose to make that horrible task a little less horrible for me.

As I stood there, in the wide moonlight silence, I fancied a sound reached me from the empty building behind; a sound like nothing so much as a woman's stifled sobbing. I spoke, and waited, and tried the door, and waited again, and called to ask if any help was wanted. But I felt all the time that the sound must have been in my imagination only, for the hush of the night was unbroken now, and the old barn silent as a vault.

I went back to the house, fearing that my

constant dread and suspense were affecting my brain. Aunt Jessie must have gone to bed; but this morning I told her. It seems as if (though I can bear in silence my one all-absorbing sorrow) I cannot bear these trifling doubts and uncertainties. Do others ever feel so, I wonder, when one great, overwhelming grief has swallowed up every joy or hope that they have ever known or dreamed of?

But I never expected Aunt Jessie to be so angry with me as she was, or to speak so scornfully and tremulously of my unhealthy fancies, sternly ordering me to keep silence on such subjects.

"Once throw suspicion on the house," she said, "and no servant will stop with us. It is a tumbledown, gloomy old place enough as it is, without your bringing ridiculous stories of ghosts to make the girls avoid it."

So I said no more to Aunt Jessie, and I have not been down to the old barn again.

I wish I might sleep to-night; but how can I? The moment I lie down, it seems as if the thoughts that had been coming singly through

the day, all start up to crowd round me at once, and grow gigantic, and burn into the darkness. And my eyes get wide and hot, and the lids ache and will not close, and my head tosses from side to side and feels like lead.

Ah, me! the night is worst of all!

Where is Gerard? Oh! Gerard, how my heart cries for you in its anguish!

And I wonder where is the false friend who committed the sin. I know he committed it, though I cannot read those blotted lines which may tell me. But I know full well whose was the real sin.

Midnight, and the house so still! I never noticed until now how different is the stillness of a happy, guiltless house, from the stillness of one in which shame and sorrow brood. Once more I will try to rest.

* * * * *

It was of no use, I could not sleep, I repeated all the hymns I knew; I counted a thousand; I tried to think of nothing; but, after it

all, sleep was as far from my eyelids as if they had never known, and never again could know, its sweet relief. And so, before the first dim vestige of the dawn appeared, I was leaning from the window, watching for it with tired, hungering eyes.

Slowly there grew out of the silence, the sound of wheels; slow, heavy wheels, in that part of the yard which I could see from my window—I mean which I could have seen if there had been light. At first I wondered a little, but then I remembered that I had last night heard grandfather tell Aunt Jessie to have a man and cart sent into the town, as soon as it was daylight, for tiles.

I had been so long unaccustomed to these old sounds, I thought with a sigh, that *that* was why I had begun so suddenly to wonder about these lagging wheels. But while I leaned there, still idly looking where the sound was, some one came into the yard with a lantern, and I saw by its light that this was Aunt Jessie.

Then my eyes grew eager indeed. Aunt

Jessie there in the yard before daylight, with a lantern in her hand, and a black shawl muffled about her bent grey head! I watched with quickened breath, for I connected this at once—as I connected everything beyond the regular routine of daily duties—with Gerard.

Ah! well might I connect this with him, for Aunt Jessie had only stood one minute beside the horse, when Gerard himself came up to her, from the gloomy hollow by the cliffs. I could not see him until he came within the light of her lantern, but I heard his step and knew it. And then I watched—oh! with such feverish pain and excitement, and dread and jealousy! If he would but take me with him! If he had only thought it would be safe to take me with him, what could have stayed me from joining him now?

But I clenched my hands upon the window-sill, and quite silently watched him, knowing he was going away from me. Oh! if I could only have been Aunt Jessie for those few moments, to kiss his sad face, and to feel his arms

about me ! But—far away, cold, and alone—I could only watch him go.

He was disguised as a carter, and he wore an old servant's hat slouched down over his face ; but, for all that, I knew him in an instant through the disguise, as I had known his step in the darkness.

I saw Aunt Jessie meet him with her hands stretched out, for she had put down the lantern on the edge of the empty cart, and I saw him kiss her just as he used to kiss her in the old days. With a quick throb at my heart, that was more like joy than anything I had known for long days, I felt that Gerard could never have kissed her *so* if there had been the shadow of guilt between them.

Then I saw her take up his hands, bend her grey head over them in the light of the candle, which already burnt low in the lantern socket, and then speak to him anxiously. I saw my brother stoop and rub the wet soil on his hands, with actually a smile upon his face, then take the whip, turn the horse by the rein, and leave the yard slowly. That was all I saw or heard ;

but I know how Gerard is making his escape. And somehow it seems easier to me now to pray for his safety.

* * * * *

After our early breakfast this morning I heard Aunt Jessie tell the waggoner to go to Penzance and bring the cart back with the tiles.

"Your master sent it in early," she said, "and you'll find it where you always stop. Go in at once; and you need not say anything about it afterwards."

She little guessed how I understood this order. She watched him out of sight, her eyes keen and eager, then she drew a long breath of relief, and re-entered the house. And all my heart went out to meet her, in gratitude for her love of Gerard.

Later on in the morning, grandfather was called out—he is growing more and more infirm, and sits for hours together now in his arm-chair—to speak to two men who had come about a horse he had to sell. He went to the

stable with them, and on round the farm, they evidently tempting him to take them on. Aunt Jessie and I, standing at the wide window, watched them. She had a startled fear upon her face, and, for the first time I ever could remember such a thing, she clung to me as if I were a little comfort to her.

"Are you afraid, Aunt Jessie," I whispered, "are you afraid that they are here to search for *him*?"

"Hush!" she cried, in quick fear. "They are come to see the young horse."

But I knew why her hold upon my arm grew tighter. Yes, they were detectives, and they had all the buildings opened and examined, before they left the farm. Oh, if they had only come yesterday, how terrible it would have been! Strange that I forgot to hide from them myself, until it was too late. I think the sound of grandfather's raised, fierce tones took all sense and power from me.

"Come *here* to search for the forger!" he cried, raising his stick in the short-lived, savage strength which his wrath gave him. "Do you

think I harbour criminals *here*? He would be too cunning to come to me, for he knows I'd be the first to give him up—the very first, the very first! Come here!" he reiterated, shrilly, "not he, the thief!—he knows me too well. I should give him up to you with my own hand; I should strike him myself, old and feeble as I am. I would never have had the law changed; I would have hanged every forger under heaven! Come *here*? He daren't!"

And then he turned to me, and spoke to me just such savage words as he had spoken of Gerard. Of course the men then knew who I was; and so I am to go and tell in public all I know of Gerard.

All I know! Will it be crime in me to hold back any of the truth? Have I, as grandfather said to me to-night—and they were the first words he had uttered to me since my return—been helping him in crime? I shall never come back here after I have been to tell of Gerard. It would not do for me to come; even Aunt Jessie said so; and, if she had not, how could I have lived upon his bounty after those cruel words

he said of me and Gerard to-day before them all ?

* * * * *

I answered all the questions they put to me, no more, no less ; but it seemed as if nothing could serve Gerard's cause. He had in his possession the cheque which Eustace Jelfrey had changed for me ; having bought it back, poor Gerard ! to keep for my sake ; and he had, a week afterwards, cashed that other cheque for one thousand pounds. One thousand pounds ! As if Gerard ever could have had such a sum, and I not know !

I told of Eustace Jelfrey, and appealed to have him examined. But he came from the preliminary inquiry unsuspected—a man exonerated from all shadow of crime. He had been a friend of Gerard Dymocke's, he said, and had once changed a cheque for his sister, but that cheque had been bought back from him by Dymocke, the very first time they were alone together afterwards. About the other cheque he knew nothing at all, but, during the three weeks that followed the date when it had been

cashed, he had noticed that Gerard Dymocke was unusually well supplied with money, and that he was unusually excited, with moody fits of depression alternating with this excitement, as his sister could testify. I suppose I could testify it, at least they seemed to take for granted that I had done so.

And thus, by some means, Eustace Jelfrey left the examination an unblamed man, and I a criminal in my own miserable thoughts, as Gerard was a criminal in the thoughts of all those who had been about me. I wonder whether, if we had had one single friend in all the city who would and could have exerted himself on our behalf, things would have been left to look just as they did look ?

I am with Rachel now in the old room which is so painfully familiar to me—with Rachel only, for a few days ago she woke one morning to find her mother lying dead beside her. The shock to Rachel has left her quite deaf, though still just her own patient, tender self. She would not let me tell her of my sorrows, but she told me of hers—as only those can tell

of sorrow who know the joys that lie beyond
—and as I listened I grew a little braver and a
little more patient.

* * * * *

All the hope is over now. Gerard, in spite
of his disguise and occupation, has been taken.
The words look like other words when they are
written; yet to think what they mean! Some
men in Penzance, who wondered about him dur-
ing the few minutes he stopped with the cart,
suspected and betrayed him, sending the police
on his track—my poor, solitary, hunted brother!
But I have lived through that time, and I can-
not dare to recall it yet.

Mr. Esdaile's son, who has come home from
America in consequence of his father's sudden
death, prosecuted with a vigour which every
one called just, but which I called merciless
and cruel. Again both Eustace Jelfrey and
I were examined; but after it all, there was
the verdict uttered, for which the way had been
prepared.

Gerard had changed the forged cheque;
Gerard had had possession of the first, of which

the forged one had been an exact copy, except that it had been made payable to Mr. Dymocke's order, instead of Miss Dymocke's; and Gerard had been caught attempting to make his escape in disguise. Gerard could deny nothing of this, and we could pay for no one to plead for him; so the trial was soon over, and he was sentenced to transportation for eight years.

Ah, how soon the words are written that mean an endless parting, an everlasting disgrace; a blight upon our lives which nothing can ever wipe away! If we meet again, we shall be old and worn and heartsick. But am I not old and worn and heartsick even to-night, while my life lies blank before me, with the terrible blankness of a storm-tossed sea?

I try to think of Gerard as he was at the farm, with the careless independence on his face, and always the coaxing gentleness in his eyes. I try to think of him as he was in London with me, when his gay, tender care and love made the life so pleasant for me. I try to fancy that I hear his voice as he sings to a thousand

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breathless listeners, with just the quiet ease with which he sings to me alone. I try to fancy that I see him at his easel, whistling softly as he works, and breaking off now and then to show me what he does, or to cheer me with a merry jest. But I cannot think of him so. I can only picture him as he sat in the cell at Newgate. And my hard, dry eyes—to which the tears, I think, can never come again—must see him always so.

* * * * *

Ever since—since I came to London, I have been trying to meet with an engagement; for I must earn a home of my own now; and what am I fit to do but teach? Perhaps the unnecessary education which was given me by our Rector's wish, will be of service to me now. If not, what is there left for me to do?

Rachel wants me to stay with her, but how could I let her work for me? True, I might help her, but my help would not be worth what she would give me. We have talked over all my plans together, she and I, and I have decided to spend the money Gerard gave me on that

last dreadful night, in seeking an engagement in which I may be able to earn enough to allow me to put something away towards—towards that sum which I feel that we owe to Mr. Esdaile. No matter where the money went, one thing I must always feel, that Gerard and I owe that sum to Clara's brother. One thousand pounds! How can such a sum ever be repaid? Yet that thought cannot prevent the duty still being ours to save it.

Clara is married now, and has gone to live at a distance. Poor child! was it a blow to her, to find that her father died insolvent? But I don't think she would grieve at that, in the greater loss of both her parents within a year of each other; and I dare say her husband now loves her tenderly, and will make up for all. He is the brother of her brother's wife, and I remember how lovingly she used to speak of "Adelaide."

Well, our paths—which ran together for a little time—are wide apart now, and may never cross again. Clara was always loving and kind to me, and even through this

miserable time, has tried to comfort and to cheer me. Can I remember her all my life save with deep gratitude? She gave me a letter when she saw me last, which, she gently said, might be of service to me if I wished to teach again! That is just Clara's delicate way of speaking. I know it will be of every use to me. At least I know that without such a letter, I might try in vain to win what I want. To-morrow I hope to begin in earnest.

* * * * *

I wonder whether many governesses have as hard work in seeking an engagement as I have had? I hope not, for the teaching is hard enough when it comes, without having these humiliations and difficulties in obtaining it. I cannot tell them all, and, indeed, I would not like to do so if I could; but I must tell about to-day, because it is to be the last day.

It began with as dreary a disappointment as need be. When I first began to try for an engagement, I sent my name, and a fee of five shillings, to a governess agency office, and as they said they had the names of many ladies

"on their books," I expected to receive quite a choice of addresses. But I waited in vain. Except one mistress of a small school, who wished for an assistant teacher, at a salary of fifteen pounds a year, I heard of none of the ladies whose names were "on the books." So I gave that idea up in despair, and put an advertisement in the *Times*. I wonder whether any author's opening chapters ever cost him more thought than the wording of that advertisement cost me?

For three or four days no answer came, but to-day I have had two. We would not open them until breakfast was over, Rachel and I, but put them in the middle of the table, and feasted our eyes upon them. Then afterwards, sitting close to Rachel, where she could read over me as she could not hear me, I took the first and opened it.

No need to read it, either I or Rachel. It was only a printed circular from the very agency to which I had applied, offering the advertiser any engagement she might desire (having many of all kinds "on their books"), in

return for a fee of five shillings. I crushed that up and burned it, trying to laugh into Rachel's sympathizing eyes, and took up the other letter.

This was just such a one, to all appearance, as I had been longing for, and my hands shook as they opened it.

Yes, it was a lady's letter, but what a different one from what I had expected when I began to read! It was from a girl like myself, who had long been trying to obtain teaching, and who had failed again and again, as I had failed. She had spent all she had, she told me with pitiful candour, in advertising, and entering the agency offices, and going about from place to place to hold interviews. And now she wrote to ask me whether, if I had any answers to my advertisement of which I did not care to make use, I would kindly give them to her.

Oh! how sad it was! Yet Rachel laughed. She said she could not help it, thinking of the answers which I *had* had; but certainly it was not a very merry laugh.

Those were my two letters, and I prepared

to go out with a heavy disappointment at my heart. I had seen the advertisement of a lady in Holloway, and I went there with hope more dead within me than it had ever been before. The house was the private residence of a Jew jeweller, and everything about the place was shine and glitter, as if he liked to see his stock about him here, as well as in the City.

A sleepy, indolent lady sat and questioned me, evidently going through a ready-prepared catechism; but the brisk little master of the house had blurted out his one all-important question almost before I was seated. What salary did I expect? After I had told him, he interrupted his wife's catechism again and again to ask me to "lower my figure." He did not mean that my five feet were too many for his great house, but that my forty pounds' demand was too much for his large purse.

I did lower it, so weary was I of trying and failing. Then they asked me to play. I played one of Beethoven's sonatas, wondering to myself, as I did so, whether it would not have been wiser to play a galop, fast and floridly.

"Pretty well," said the lady of the house, languidly, as I rose; "but I prefer something classical."

I could not venture to answer, and so stupidly had my thoughts wandered to the music, that I was but dimly aware of all she was enforcing upon me.

I could understand that she was willing to engage me to instruct her "young ladies," and that she expected me to undertake everything ranging from thorough bass efficiently ("a part of every lady's education now," she said) to fashionable fancy work, three languages, painting, and dancing included.

I was dimly aware that I promised to do all this, and that the little father of the "young ladies" made another appeal to me then to "lower my figure," but that his wife whispered to him that I was "very low," and he had better let it rest. Truly I did feel very low then, in this glitter which was not gold.

And so I was engaged; and I begin my duties next week. Mrs. Raphael kept Clara Esdaile's letter. Perhaps that is usual, but I

did so hope she would give it back to me, as I could see that it satisfied her entirely. I had not read it myself, for I knew it was not for my eyes that Clara had written it.

* * * * *

Four whole years it is, since last I sat writing in this room of Rachel's. Four years of hard, dull work, of unacknowledged service; four years of real heart-loneliness. Well, it is over now, and I have other work, and another home once more to seek; feeling so tired, even before I begin. But I must not mind, it has to be done, and perhaps this will be the last time: There can surely never be another such a cruel ending as there has been to this four years' task of mine.

I never shall know how they found out all about Gerard and myself. I never shall know anything distinctly about it, except how their reproaches and their scoffings stabbed me. If they would only have sent me away quietly I should not have minded, for I have been teaching myself always to be prepared for that; but,

oh! it was hard to bear the scorn and derision of—such as those!

Mrs. Raphael wrote at once to Clara's husband—Clara died three years ago—telling him that his dead wife had been deceitful and untrue; saying just what such women *do* say when they let their malice go uncurbed. Was not that an unnecessary insult, to him as well as to me? But I will not write another word about them.

I am here now, with my life to begin again, and the one letter, which was my only help before, is mine no more. Mrs. Raphael tore it to atoms, and burnt it in her anger, sneering because a cry escaped me as it blazed. Hard as I tried to suppress that cry, it started from my lips in spite of me.

I can only search the papers now, in the hope that I may one day see some engagement at a distance for which I may apply; and how closely I search them, sitting here alone!

Rachel is living for this month at a house in Berkeley Square. The family being out of town, and the woman who has before been left

in charge having proved dishonest, they have asked Rachel to stay there until the season begins.

I go to her every day, and we sit together sewing through the evening, but I am alone here at the old rooms until then. She never comes to me; she says the walk, short as it is, does me good, and she is sure to be right. So I go, and she brings me back, and we walk as slowly as we can, and cheer each other, and notice how the evenings are lengthening.

And so that day is over, and to-morrow the papers come, and it begins all over again.

* * * * *

What a strange thing it is to be expecting one certain letter on which all one's future hangs! My future, indeed—my long, long future—seems to hang upon the answer which will come from Highshire, and which may come now by any post. Is it any wonder that I watch for the hour so eagerly? And yet, looking back upon my deceit, is it any wonder that I watch for it with pain?

This is how it was. I saw the advertise

ment, and in a moment my heart began to beat with a quick, wild hope. One hundred pounds a year, simply to be companion to a lady.

I felt a strange, incomprehensible reliance on my own power, and I answered it at once; I could not bear the delay of an hour, though I knew I should keep the letter open to take to Rachel. I did not write much—I almost think my heart was too full—but an answer came back to me, expressing satisfaction with all I had said, and asking for my reference.

Then I knew I had written to Lady Athelston, and my heart failed me. Could I go to live so in my father's house?

All that day I kept the letter hidden in my breast, and had not courage to show it to Rachel. But it was all told afterwards, and then Rachel made her plan. I was to write to Lady Athelston, referring her to "Mrs. M'Mullen, 18, Berkeley Square." This address would sound well; the letter would reach Rachel straightforwardly, and she would answer it.

She did—writing as pretty and ladylike a

letter as any inhabitant of the Square could do—and for the answer to that letter I am waiting now. I cannot work, or eat, or sleep.

Is it right to have accepted a situation with Lady Athelston? She was Sir Gerard's widow, married to him for just one month; and her son now—not his son, though, oh! no, not his—is the Baronet of High Athelston. I have never written the names before to-day, since that night, nearly five years ago, when Aunt Jessie told us our mother's story.

Suppose—but why think of these things now? It cannot be wrong for me to go. No, it cannot be wrong for me to go.

I felt that I would gratefully accept anything that brought me money which I could save; then how could I resist the temptation of that offer of one hundred pounds a year? Through all the very most hopeful time of my trying, I never fancied I could earn that. Eighty pounds a year I shall be able to put away, towards paying that terrible debt of Gerard's and mine. Four years are gone—half the

time of his absence; and through those years I have been able to save so little.

How long they have seemed! Yet now that they are over, here I am, waiting for my fate in Rachel's quiet room, just as I was waiting then.

And how have these four years passed with others? With Rachel, evenly, busily, and patiently; of that I am sure, though through all that time she has never, for one hour, ceased to miss her mother, and to hope—against hope—that she should see her adopted child again. She never has done so; nor has she seen Eustace Jelfrey since Gerard's trial.

At the old farm grandfather lives on alone. When—only by chance—I heard of Aunt Jessie's death, I wrote to ask him if he would see me. Twice I wrote, for I fancied my first letter might not have reached him; but I never had an answer. I wish he had written to me, even if only to tell me that he would not see me.

* * * * *

I don't know what put it into my head this evening to show Rachel that little note Gerard

threw into my hands on the night he went away. I think I must have taken it to her just because I was so tired of talking of that other letter which we are expecting; or perhaps only because my thoughts were so full of Gerard. Now I am very, very glad I took it; for, between us, we have managed to read most of the blotted words. It took hours to do it; but I think we have read them rightly now. This is what we make them out to be :

“A month ago he told me a specious lie. He told me that Mr. Esdaile was lending him a sum of money just for a few weeks, in which time he should inherit a sum of five thousand pounds. But he said he was so afraid of the fact of his having borrowed money reaching the ears of the dying old woman, who had made a will in his favour, that Mr. Esdaile had himself proposed drawing the cheque for Jelfrey in the name of a friend.

“I believed this lie, just as he said it. I know now that I was mad and blind; but he had a wonderful influence over me, and I never suspected. I offered the cheque he gave .

me, firmly believing it to be Mr. Esdaile's own. From the time the knowledge dawned upon me, I was miserable, only praying him to restore the money, or to free me from my oath of silence. He could do neither yet, he told me, entreating my forbearance just for a little longer. But I have no written proof of this, and what is my word worth against the facts? Nothing will save me; but, before God, I am innocent."

"Oh, Rachel," I cried, when it seemed plain to us, "why did he blot it? I could have told this at the trial; I could have told the judge the truth."

"Perhaps his own impulse was the wisest, my dear."

"But why?" I cried; "he would not have written it, if it had not been true."

"He crossed the words out for some reason," Rachel said, very pityingly, "it must have been to prevent your having any knowledge of the transaction, and so guard against your testimony being necessary."

"Then why did he write them at all?"

"He wrote them instinctively, dear, no

doubt," she said, "in his desire for you to know the truth."

"Then why did he not tear them off?" I moaned, holding the letter tight in my clasped hands.

"Don't you see that on the opposite side of the sheet is written what he does really want you to read? Perhaps he had no more paper."

And then—just hearing those few commonplace words which told of his helplessness—the tears that are so seldom in my eyes now, rushed to them; and I sobbed in Rachel's arms until I had not strength left me to go back; so she put me to sleep in her own bed, just as she might have put a little child.

* * * * *

To-morrow I leave here. Once more I am starting on a new path. Is it wrong and un-trustful to wonder where it will lead? Oh! I will try so hard to do my duty; and perhaps, as God is always pitiful, this home will not be closed against me as others have been. Yet the old haunting presentiment is still with me, and I cannot feel that the sorrow of my life and

Gerard's can be taken away for long years to come, even if ever.

Oh! I hope it is right (at least, not wrong) for me to be going to High Athelston, tempted only by that offer of one hundred pounds salary. So much of that I shall be able to save for Gerard.

Is all love of money real avarice? If so, what an almost universal sin it must be! I was thinking to-night, as I came home with Rachel, of that last evening at home when Gerard told Aunt Jessie he would redeem his name. Poor Gerard!—poor Gerard! If I could only know what he does in that hard life of his—so far away from me—that I might follow him all the more closely, day by day, in my thoughts! Four years more, and he will be free; and through that time I shall be helping him. There, that shall be my last thought to-night—almost a glad one.

* * * * *

END OF MAGDALEN'S DIARY

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE DUSK.

THE chill November shadows were creeping in upon Lina, when she closed the book at last and slowly rose with it in her hand. Her face was pained in its white stillness, and her eyes had a dreamy sorrow in them which it was sad to see, as she locked up the book again, and, standing by the window, looked out far off among the hills.

"Now it is time to go to Gerard," she thought, a quiet patience struggling into her beautiful eyes. "Then, after I have seen him, the way will lie clear before me. I feel so old and tired now to begin it all again—alone. Ah! if only he might think it safe for me to go with him."

Once more, noiselessly and unobserved in her dark dress, Lina crept down to the west door, then through the park and out into the lane, where the dusk deepened fast among the arched trees.

Dorcas Cheere, standing just within her cottage-door and preparing to lock herself in, saw the girl walk up the garden-path, and waited a moment to enjoy the opportunity of letting out a little superfluous viciousness.

"He's out," she snapped, coming a step forward, as Lina tapped softly at the artist's door; "and a blessed thing it is for some of us when he is out."

"Has he been gone long?" asked Lina, timidly.

"Not a bit too long," returned Dorcas, jerking out the words, "considering how he goes on when he's here. It makes one frightened of being alone in one's house, to see him come to his door and talk to any begging vagabond that chooses to try him. If he hasn't money to send his boy to school, he oughtn't to have money to give *them*. There was one here just

as he was going out, and he must turn back, forsooth! to get him money—a skulking ticket-of-leave man, I'll be bound! I keep my door locked, for it's more likely to be my things they're after than his—as he hasn't any.”

But Dorcas, sharply as she spoke, had eyes to see the deathly pallor which crept to Lina's very lips at her words.

“You'd better come in and rest a bit, Miss Chester,” she said, modifying her tone a little.

But Lina, faltering her thanks, turned away, and, following the winding field-path behind the cottages, came presently out into the valley, where the shadows glided swift and dim.

No sign of Gerard yet; and the small dark figure hurried on in that great solitude among the hills, which echoed so drearily the solitude of her heart. No sign of Gerard yet; and the shadows came on and wrapped themselves about her, chilling her until she shivered as we shiver when some awful unknown evil nears us. No sign of Gerard yet, and she dared not call. Hill behind hill, hill beyond hill, she searched the whole expanse, with a great dread in her

wide and desolate eyes ; but there was no sign of Gerard yet.

At last, upon the narrow path beyond the waterfall, she saw a group of figures coming towards her, and her heart leaped with relief and thankfulness. It was some moments still before she could recognise them, and then the fear crept slowly back—a greater fear than it had been before. The two boys were together on Jack Esdaile's pony, and beside them rode Louisa Castillain, who had joined them higher up the valley, because she knew who had been asked to meet them. And there was no one else.

Slowly Lina went on towards the path on which they rode. Beyond this path, and above it, lay the silent tarn in the deep shadow, and beside this tarn—almost close beside it—two men had met upon the narrow footway which ran so near its treacherous waters ; and the words that left their lips were those hot words of fierce, ungovernable rage which can be rarely either heard or uttered a second time in any man's life.

The two horses came on. Lina heard a shout of recognition from the lips of the boys on the pony, and she knew that they, too, could see her brother and Eustace Jelfrey. She knew Miss Castillain's eyes took in all the scene; yet Lina thought she saw nothing in all the world but the two men who stood there, strong and defiant; knowing nothing of those who watched them, knowing only that they had met in the solitude, and that strength and cowardice, revenge and hatred, justice and injustice, would not rest with words alone—even such words as those.

Lina started forward, trembling helplessly; one dread only filling her heart and urging her steps. Gerard knew nothing of the mine beneath the water. To Gerard this was only a shallow mountain lake. Could she reach him in time?

Her steps were weak and nerveless, as if she were trying to run in a dream. Louisa Castillain drew up her horse as the small, dark figure passed across the bridle-road. There was still the slight ascent to climb; to Lina it seemed

like a terrific mountain in her way, while her steps faltered in their haste and fear.

The two men, with flashing eyes and ringing words of hate, had met in a close and savage embrace; and had not seen her. A few more steps—only a few more: slow and tedious, but only a few more! Before half of these few steps were taken, Lina had fallen to the ground as if the unseen hand of death had smitten her in an instant; for the wide, watching eyes had seen the end; then closed in sudden blindness.

Lina had seen how the man who had been wronged, fought with the man who for years had wronged him, and how, with a fierce and frantic strength, he had flung him back into the water whose secret he did not know; and then had left the spot; walking quite slowly in the opposite direction, but still never seeing her. And other eyes had seen the end too. Louisa Castillain had seen how the man whom nobody knew and nobody cared for, fought with the man she loved; and how, with a murderous strength, he had hurled him into the

water which meant death, and then had turned away deliberately, because the deed was done.

And the boys had seen how the man who had always had pleasant, merry words for both, and womanly care for one, fought with the man from whom both shrank with an instinctive antipathy. And even *they* knew, as they clung tremblingly to each other, that, in this dusk among the hills to-day, an awful deed had been committed, of which they knew the name, though the horror of its meaning had never entered into the heart of either; and now it seemed as if a voice were whispering it to them again and again, in this new and terrible experience.

And Louisa Castillain, too, as she galloped wildly down the valley, felt this one word whispered about her, and echoing from hill to hill.

CHAPTER X.

LOUISA'S TIDINGS.

THE shabby phaeton, which was the only vehicle Marjorie Castillain was allowed to drive, stood at the post-office door, half-way down the steep street of Churchill.

Marjorie had no idea that her custom was valued by Mr. Johnson Mathers, or that her visits were pleasant to him; she thought far too lowly of herself, and far too meanly of her financial resources, to imagine either the one or the other; but certain it is that, since he had helped her on the day she went to him with her first request, she had made as many errands to the shop as she could, and avoided, in that delicate thoughtfulness which recognised the

debt of gratitude, the same to the postmaster as to the highest gentleman in the land, allowing any of her trivial orders to be included in Louisa's, when she sent up to a London stationer. And Mr. Mathers instinctively understood all this, and it made him value more the genial, gentle brightness of the girl who always had been his favourite (if his smallest) customer.

The pleasant "good afternoon" had been spoken, and Marjorie was passing through the door which he held open, when Sir Neil Athelston, on the opposite side of the road, caught sight of her and crossed.

"Alone, Marjorie?" he asked, as they shook hands. The words sounded careless enough, but the young baronet's eyes were unusually intent as he asked the question.

"Yes, alone," she answered lightly; "why not? Louie has ridden Tristram up the valley, and will ride back with Jack Esdaile. Louie adores Jack Esdaile."

"*Erratum*—read the initials reversed," put in Neil, coolly. "But, Marjorie," he added, in a

tone so unconsciously anxious that Marjorie guessed in a moment at the motive of his question, "tell me where you have been, and who has been with you all this day. You told me at the ball last night that you would come to High Athelston to-day."

"And I intend to do so, Neil," replied Marjorie, her voice catching the anxiety of his. "Where are you going now?"

"To the Rectory. I have been deluded into some appointment with our two active magistrates, Jorden and Stuart, and I suppose, unnecessary as I may be, I must not fail to be there to meet them."

"Of course not," laughed Marjorie, "being High Sheriff. What an awe-inspiring meeting, Neil—two magistrates and a sheriff! Shall I come, self-invited, and introduce a little counter-element?"

"I wish you would," he answered, absently, little guessing how unheeded her presence was to be when she *did* come. "But the fact is, Marjorie, I thought you had Miss Chester with you. My mother is at Burton, and so I thought

that, as you are always so good to Miss Chester, you would have taken her out, or called to see her, or done something to make this leisure day a kind of holiday to her."

"But you must have known (seeing her at home) that she was not with me."

And Marjorie, a little frightened—she hardly knew why, except that she was always prepared for sorrowful tidings of Lina—spoke far more earnestly than she wot of.

"But I have not seen her to-day," the young man said. "Martin found out that she was in her room all morning, but she could not have stayed there until I left at dusk—could she, Marjorie?"

"Hardly," said Marjorie, tersely. "Neil, I will walk on with you. Shall I tell James to keep the phaeton here to take us back?"

"Not necessary," Neil answered readily, by no means relishing the idea of driving the ancient Hawkedale quadruped. "My dog-cart is to follow me to the Rectory. I enjoyed the walk into the town, but don't care for it back again."

Let me drive you, Marjorie, and send James home."

She did as he bade her, and they turned and walked up the street together, many eyes following the handsome young couple, whose marriage-day could not be long in coming now, and would be a holiday for Churchill.

"Will you come into the formidable Rectory study, then, Marjorie," Sir Neil inquired, "and make out a case to divert us?"

"To give you something to do? The talented young sheriff has had no opportunity yet for displaying his ideas of justice."

"Churchill is such a stupidly cautious and exemplary spot," he answered, still with the absent tone in his voice. "Our magistrates never have a case worth hearing. Can't you bring us one?"

"I could take papa up," mused Marjorie, "for robbing me of every luxury; but I don't think of anything definite against—Neil," she added, suddenly breaking off in her forced jest, "is there any *reason* for Miss Chester keeping her own room to-day?"

"Reason?" he echoed, astonished. "Why, Marjorie, what reason could she have to-day more than on any other day?"

"I don't know," ruminated Marjorie, "but one never knows what may have been disc—may have happened in one's absence; and so—and so, at any rate I am at liberty to ask," she concluded, with a forced laugh.

"No," Neil answered, wondering now at her earnestness, "nothing has happened; indeed, I don't see what could have happened. Have *you* heard anything, Marjorie?"

She raised her face suddenly to his, a grave wistfulness in her eyes, as she answered, almost solemnly,

"If I *did* hear anything, Neil, what difference would that make? No friend of mine would ever be doubted in my heart because of anything I had heard. Neil, should *you* believe evil things of one you had learned to respect? Could you—could you ever do it, Neil?"

He was wondering at her tone, half inclined to smile, when a sudden idea struck him.

"Marjorie, can you be thinking of Miss Chester when you say this?"

"I need not be thinking of anyone in particular," she answered, rather quickly. "Look how fast some one is riding down the valley. From the Rectory garden, we shall be able to see who it is."

So, in the garden, they turned a little aside among the shrubs, to look over the hedge into the valley. A boy was hastily opening the gate which led from it into the road, and through the opened gate the horse and rider came on without a pause.

"Tristram—Louie—I declare it is Louie!" cried Marjorie, starting a little; "alone, and in haste! I wonder why?"

"Rare event," laughed Neil. "I wonder whether Louisa has ever been in a hurry before in all her life."

Even before the words were all uttered, Louisa had turned Tristram, and drawn him up at the Rectory gate. Neil moved forward and opened it for her, but she passed him without a word, cantering on up the sloping drive.

"Stop, Louie, stop!" cried Marjorie, in a breathless voice, subdued in all its eagerness. "Stop one moment, Louie, and tell *us* first."

Neil stood astonished. "Tell what?" he questioned.

But Marjorie did not heed him in her eagerness, and Louisa did not heed either of them. She drew up Tristram at the door, and dismounting with Neil's ready help, but giving him no word or glance of thanks, passed into the house; her face flushed in odd fluctuating patches, under her stiff, high hat; her habit sweeping behind her, over the red and white tiles. Marjorie followed her; so white and frightened-looking that Neil, seeing her, started forward and laid his hand upon her arm.

"Marjorie, in heaven's name, what has frightened you?"

A strange, dreamy smile stirred her lips, but her brows were drawn with pain.

"Louisa will tell us what it is," she said, most sadly, yet sarcastically, too. "Wait a

minute, she will tell us; who could do it better?"

In the hall, just at the study door, Emily Jorden met them.

"I saw you coming," she said, smiling shyly at Sir Neil, and then linking her arm within Marjorie's, in the clinging attitude she loved. "If you are going into the study, I may come too, but I dare not go alone. Papa has such solemn meetings there. Oh! I should be afraid of hearing them! Not that I should be scolded," she added, with her innocent upraised glance past Marjorie's thoughtful face. "Papa never scolds *me*."

"Spoilt child!" returned Sir Neil, recognizing himself appealed to.

"Am I spoiled, Marjorie?" she asked, evidently relishing his pleasant, lazy patronage. "Am I spoiled more than other girls?"

"I don't know," rejoined Marjorie, her face full of another thought. "I suppose it's the same all the world over. All the roses fall to one, all the thorns to another."

They had entered now the long comfort-

able room which Mr. Jorden called his study, and he had risen in astonishment from the easy-chair, in which he had sat deliberating with Colonel Stuart, who, leaving the fellow-chair unoccupied, stood upon the rug with his back to the fire.

The Rector glanced in surprise from one to another, as his visitors entered unannounced; but the Colonel's grave eyes sought rapidly and instinctively for some unusual reason—sought it first in Miss Castillain's face, and last in her sister's. Before they had turned from hers, Louisa had spoken, and made his one faint, unacknowledged doubt into a certainty.

"Mr. Jorden—Colonel Stuart," she cried, approaching them rapidly, "come quick, or send, or do something! Mr. Jelfrey has been killed in the valley, and thrown into the pool—the old mine, you know! I—I saw it done; I saw him murdered!"

She stopped here, overcome by her anger and her grief. But a minute afterwards she repeated the words with sudden strength and heat—"I saw him murdered!"

The unbreathed word among the hills had found at last a voice which would not shrink from uttering it.

"Miss Castillain," said Colonel Stuart, with cold gravity, though the colour had rushed even into *his* calm face, "be careful what you say, even here, among friends only; for no single word can be retracted."

"I saw it!" she cried again, in quick, assured eagerness. "Why should I retract true words? I saw him murdered!"

"Is it too late for help?" put in Marjorie. "We have had the boat-house drag at Hawke-dale, and it is there now. Please send for it, Mr. Jorden—a man on horse-back; and he can leave word for them to bring the little boat. But do have the drag at once!"

Mr. Jorden had his hand on the bell, when Colonel Stuart stopped him.

"Would you object to taking the order to the man yourself?" he said. "Why should we have this presently talked of all over the town, and have a crowd to hinder us, too?"

"I see," the Rector assented. "I will not bring the servants in here."

When he returned from speaking to his groom, Louisa was still talking of what she had seen.

"Will he be in time?" asked Marjorie of him, in a voice of intense anxiety.

"If any man could," the Rector answered, laying his hand with fatherly tenderness upon her clasped fingers. "But I fear it is too late for such help to be of any avail. It must have been either too late or unnecessary even from the moment your sister left the tarn; too late to have saved him if he fell down the shaft; unnecessary if he only slipped into the water around it. He is an excellent swimmer, and would have rescued himself in such a case. Miss Castillain, did you wait at all, after the deed was done?"

"No," sobbed Louisa; "I galloped off at once for help. Oh, if it is too late it will be your fault! Why do you stay here?"

"Though all help may be impossible," said Sir Neil, his handsome face as white and per-

plexed as the faces about him, "we need not waste even these few moments. We are all ready."

"One thing, Miss Castillain," interposed the Rector; "did you ride straight and fast from the mine here?"

"I started at once, and never stopped. I saw it all. I saw distinctly the man who did it; so did others."

"You need not tell us yet," put in Colonel Stuart, quietly, as he moved to the door.

"Jack saw it," cried Louisa, in sharp, quick tones, between her sobs; "and," she added, while the Colonel's eyes met hers in pained surprise; "and the man's own son saw it—the murderer's own son!"

"What!" cried Sir Neil with a sudden start, "you don't mean—great Heaven! Louisa, you don't mean that—that *Spendir* has murdered Jelfrey?"

"Who else—who else?" Louisa almost shrieked, in a tone both malevolent and miserable. "I saw him, and the boys saw him, and Miss Chester saw him."

Colonel Stuart, his hand upon the door, stopped as her words reached him, a sudden mist before his eyes. Sir Neil, in the act of rebutting his overcoat, started as if the few sharp words had struck him.

From Marjorie's tightened lips a cry of real and bitter pain escaped, which made Neil, in all his haste and agitation, turn with a quick and anxious look of sympathy which was quite new to his indolent eyes. For one instant she laid her hands pleadingly upon his arm, and seemed wishful to speak; but then, with a sudden stinging recollection, she drew them away, and stood back while he passed her in his haste.

Then, out in the hall, she stopped beside Colonel Stuart, the pleading look deepening and saddening her eyes.

"Colonel Stuart," she said, "you remember how lonely she is, and how young, and how weak, and how—how much more friendless than any of us. Oh! need *her* evidence be called against him?"

"Please God, she is not there," he answered, in the same low tone, smiling a little into the

eyes that were so beautiful now in their child-like wistfulness. "I will remember."

Only three words, yet so full of tender sympathy and brave hope, that her heart leaped gratefully within her.

"Oh, make haste, make haste!" sobbed Louisa, hurrying through the hall, her tone so sharp and penetrating that it was the first to rouse the curiosity of the servants.

"Where did you leave her, exactly?" asked Sir Neil, thinking it unnecessary to explain of whom he spoke.

"I don't know whom you mean," stammered Miss Castillain, stubbornly, her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Where did you leave Miss Chester?" he said, his raised voice sterner and more abrupt than she had ever heard it before.

"At the tarn, close to it—I think. At any rate, she was there at the time," rejoined Miss Castillain, not so much confused as careless; "I saw her running towards them."

"Them! Do you know that you are implicating Mr. Jelfrey, too?" put in the Rector,

stopping her. "Don't say any more yet, please, Miss Castillain."

"But Sir Neil asked me about Miss Chester," she sobbed, with renewed tears; "and I tell him I saw her running towards Mr. Spendir as he struck the blow—" her grief had not quite deprived Louisa of her cunning—"and when she saw he had killed him she fainted. How could I wait to see more when I wanted help?"

And then Louisa's sobs seemed to overcome her utterly.

But Neil took no trouble to offer even a soothing word.

"I shall find her," he muttered, with contemptuous lips.

"Oh! what shall we do?" cried Emily Jorden, weeping bitterly, and clinging to her father's arm. "Will it be too late?"

"Hush!" he said, appeasingly; "let us hope it is all well. It is possible, dear. Ah! thank Heaven! there's Sir Neil's dog-cart coming up the lawn. Go to mamma, my pet; I shall soon be back."

If there had been a hundred lives at stake

the father would have had time for his child's kiss.

"Quick!" cried Sir Neil, springing to his seat, and holding the furs aside for Mr. Jorden to take his place beside him; while the Colonel swiftly mounted behind, and, on his own responsibility, told Ridley he would not be wanted. Cautiously Neil held in the fresh, thoroughbred horses, and bent to speak to Marjorie; raising his hat instinctively as he did so.

"You were always her friend, Marjorie," he said. "Be satisfied, dear—I will find her."

"I am coming," she answered, coldly; but he did not hear. His selfish impatience dominating over every other thought, he urged on his horses down the slope; and soon they were racing over the shadowy turf, Louisa Castillain, who had mounted again, following as rapidly as she could.

"Emily," whispered Marjorie, entreating as Miss Jorden had never heard her entreat before, "lend me your horse and your skirt, will you? Nothing else—I cannot wait for anything else. Fetch the skirt, and I'll saddle the horse myself."

Deftly and rapidly she did it, ran back into the house for a moment to change her skirt, then mounted without assistance, and cantered on, with tightened rein, beside the swollen brook.

Long before the dog-cart reached the tarn, she had left Louisa behind, and she only slackened speed when she saw the three gentlemen standing in the gloom beside the water.

Only those three, she said to herself, with a gasp that sounded like relief. She joined them with a quiet pain upon her face; but the water—growing darker and darker every moment now, as the long November night drew on—held its secret safely. She turned sick and faint as she stood there, for to her heart also was whispered now that one miserable word whose echo must linger for evermore about this spot.

“If he had saved himself,” remarked Mr. Jordan, “we should have seen him. I have no further hope of that. There is no trace of his struggling to shore.”

“There are traces of a struggle here,” said

Colonel Stuart, who had been cautiously examining the footpath which skirted the edge of the water. "There are footmarks here of more than one."

"Yes," answered his brother magistrate, gravely, "it must have ended with that deadly act. This will be a painful business."

And then there was a short and puzzled silence among them, and not one but wished that he had not been sheriff or magistrate just then.

"I suppose, Sir Neil," Mr. Jorden said at last, "I must first send the police to Mr. Spendir's cottage."

Neil answered moodily that he supposed so. His thoughts hardly followed the Rector's words; and Marjorie knew this.

"Neil," she whispered, her sweet voice very low and earnest, "do not go on to-night. Dear Neil, it will be kindest not to seek her."

"Absurd!" he answered, with a gesture of impatience; "she has been frightened, and is alone. Where is your womanly pity?"

"The pity I feel," returned Marjorie, hurt at

his tone, but still gently entreating him, "I wish you could understand—oh, I wish you could! Don't seek her, Neil."

But again he spurned her words, in eager, petulant haste.

"Real pity for her I see you cannot understand," she said then, coldly. "Go and bring her back here, if you will. You have been cruel to her always; crown it with this last and meanest cruelty."

He hardly seemed to understand what she was saying.

"Must I go to this fellow's cottage before I have my own liberty, Jorden?" he asked, haughtily.

"I should like you to do so. I think we ought," the Rector said.

"And we may perhaps see Miss Chester *there*," put in Colonel Stuart, to delay him; "she is very likely to have gone with the boys, either there or to the Anchorage."

But Colonel Stuart knew that Lina Chester's one great effort would be to go as far away from all of them as she could—he knew it even better

than Marjorie did, because he knew what would be her reason.

"If we are bound to go before—before we do anything else," put in Sir Neil, in his inborn impatience, "let us go at once, for Heaven's sake! If you will drive for me, Stuart, I will walk across the field path to the cottages. I shall be there as soon as you are, and——"

He did not finish the sentence, but they all knew that he went in the hope of meeting or overtaking Lina, in the path which she would be sure to have taken if she had intended to go to the cottages.

In driving through the town, the Rector was detained again and again; once for quite half an hour by a fellow-clergyman, who had driven from a distance on purpose to see him, and could not be kept in town in the deepening gloom of the evening. Through these hindrances Colonel Stuart waited patiently, rejoicing over each one, and lengthening it as much as possible.

"Had you not better go on, Colonel?" Mr. Jorden whispered, as another delay occurred from one of his own curates. "I don't like to

show I'm in haste. Sir Neil will have arrived at the cottage already, so that will be all right, and I wish to avoid suspicion."

"Of course—of course," assented the Colonel, with remarkable promptness. "Don't hasten, and whatever you do, avoid all appearance of excitement. I don't mind how long I wait for you."

And so it chanced that when at last they reached the cottages in Nether Lane, Sir Neil was at the gate waiting for them; his face to the road, white and angry and perplexed.

"We need not wait," he said, when the horses stopped; "we need none of us wait here."

"Is there no fear of his escaping us?" inquired Mr. Jorden, as Sir Neil still stood, without offering to take his seat.

"No fear," the Baronet answered, so decisively that neither of them for a moment questioned his word. "You will come on with me—and dine?" Neil asked, as if his thoughts were far away from the dining, yet as if he dreaded their going back.

"Miss Chester was not at the cottage, then?"

inquired Colonel Stuart, asking the question as frankly and genially as he could, when the Rector had declined Sir Neil's invitation, on plea of work at home.

"No."

"Then if you will walk on, Athelston," said the Colonel, seeing he wished it, "I will drive back and bring Miss Marjorie to High Athelston."

Neil understood the delicate kindness of this plan, and smiled his thanks, as he shook hands with the Rector and turned away.

"What can he have heard or seen in there?" questioned Mr. Jorden, as they turned and drove on down the darkening lane. "Something has perplexed and hurt him—enraged him too. And yet below it all is some other thought which is engrossing him. Can it possibly be anxiety about Miss Chester?"

Colonel Stuart drove on in silence. There was no need to tell how sure he was of this.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TWO ATHELSTONS.

THE water in that tarn among the hills still rippled in widening circles which told so much, and yet so little, when Fitz Spendir (his face set in hard stern lines, though he was quite cool to all outward seeming) walked on past the waterfall, making—almost unconsciously—a wide circuit before he took the footpath across the Hill to Nether Lane.

He turned the key in the door, and entered his cottage with a listless step. Bare and chill and empty the room looked to him, as he hesitated a moment within the threshold.

“What matter,” he muttered, pushing the hair.

from his sunburnt face, "what matter how cheerless? It can hardly look more solitary even when we have left it,—for he will be doubly bent upon our leaving now. Poor Jet! Poor laddie! It was almost cruel, after all, to rescue the boy only just to link his life with mine. My life! What a grand problem it has been! Well, I have spoken to that villain to-night for the first time since he taught me, five years ago, how black a man's heart *could* be; taught me other lessons too, good lessons—useful lessons. My God! I dare remember this, and know that it was only into a shallow pond I flung him! Why, the whole ocean could not wash away the blackness of his foul heart; and I only threw him *there*. He, the best swimmer in all Highshire—unless the weight of his mean crimes—"

Fitz—busy now arranging his work—broke off with a laugh, keen and sarcastic, but hardly bitter; there seemed even now to belong no bitterness to the handsome bronzed face and the warm, brave eyes.

"I'm sorry I didn't go on to meet the lad," he thought, bending busily over his pencil; "but

somehow he went out of my head entirely, and it's no use going back now. He can well take care of himself, poor little fellow; he has had practice enough, at any rate, to keep his hand in. I must have a light, but I can leave the shutters open to guide him."

So, beside the lamp in the unshuttered room, the artist was sitting, intent and occupied, when, from the gloom without, that was not darkness even yet, Sir Neil Athelston came in to him.

At the opening of the door, Fitz had raised his head with a welcoming glance, thinking to see Jet. When his eyes met Sir Neil's, they darkened suddenly and strangely.

"An unexpected honour," he said, looking coolly at the young Baronet, and leaning back in his stiff, hard chair. "To what do I owe the charm of this surprise?"

Sir Neil was anxious, evidently anxious, else his face would have illustrated more vividly the haughtiness of the thoughts which stirred within him at the artist's words.

"I wonder you venture to ask," he said;

"you are too fresh from your crime to need a reminder of it, and I do not covet the pleasure of recapitulating it."

"I should be glad to know to what crime you refer," put in Fitz, deliberately. "I am accustomed to having crimes laid to my charge, but I like clearness in the accusation. Go on; I have no other objection to offer—merely that one of vagueness in the charge brought against me."

"Confound it!" exclaimed Sir Neil, hotly, "what do you mean by speaking to me so?—you, a murderer! A fellow who ought to be in prison now—who *will* be in prison before an hour is over!"

"Oh, in prison!" echoed Fitz, in a voice whose strange, slow gravity struck on his listener's ear. "Quite a pleasant place, when you're used to it. My lines always *have* fallen in pleasant places though, as somebody says; and so I've learnt to expect it. Have you any prospect to hold out to me beyond that general one of a prison, Neil Athelston?"

"I should think you have but one prospect to hold out for yourself," Neil answered, feeling a little at a disadvantage, in spite of his pride and authoritativeness. "Evidence is too strong against you, even for you to hope for life. Four people saw you fling Jelfrey down the shaft of the old mine. Few men care to commit murder in presence of so many witnesses."

Fitz rose quite leisurely, and, leaning against the chimney opposite Sir Neil, gazed at him steadfastly, almost curiously; no sign in face or attitude of the great, cold qualm which almost stilled his heart-beats.

"Life!" he repeated, ironically; "and suppose I do not hope for life; how are you noble distributors of justice going to relieve me of it?"

"These questions are absurd," interposed Sir Neil, growing uncomfortable under the gaze of the clear, dauntless eyes. "You know what the law demands of those who take life; and you know how you have taken life to-day. By Jove! I didn't come to tell

you of it, but to have you taken, and—and to——”

Sir Neil Athelston was not doing himself credit in this interview, and he knew it. He had entered the cottage for the purpose of annihilating the murderer, without condescending to lower himself to explain anything; and here was the murderer questioning him with a manner cool and proud and self-possessed as his own—or more so. Besides that, he had come to ask a question on another subject, or to make some hoped-for discovery; and here he was hesitating over the question, and as far from being able to discover where Lina Chester might be, as he had been out in the darkening valley, where he had sought for her in vain.

“Have I the pleasure of receiving you as an amateur policeman, then?” asked Fitz, calmly.

“We have no need of amateurs in the case,” rejoined the young Baronet, with sternness. “There will be professional ones here presently.”

“Then you may sit there, near the door,

keeping your self-imposed guard," remarked Fitz, with a slight, haughty gesture to one—the most distant from the fire—of the three chairs which were all the room contained. "Did you bring the handcuffs?"

Neil Athelston was as incapable of sounding the depths of scorn and defiance hidden under these leisurely words as he was of understanding the intense muscular earnestness of the man before him. What could he comprehend of the teachings of a proud, wronged, hunted life like this? How could he fathom a heart that had been bright, and brave, and hopeful through years of the deepest humiliation which can be suffered under God's wide and merciful heaven? What had his pampered nature ever had to battle with, that any experience of *his* could bring him near enough to this man to understand anything in his words beyond their arrogance? But yet he treated them in the wisest way in which a wiser man could have done, for he treated them as if they had not been uttered.

Passing the chair which had been so coolly assigned him, he came up to the table on which the artist's block and brushes lay. And now the one only earnest purpose which had ever stirred him, gave his face an eagerness which Fitz, from his lounging position opposite, studied with keen intentness.

"Where did Miss Chester go after she left the lake?" he asked. "Tell me that, Spendir; we have no other matter to settle now—you and I."

"We *have* another matter to settle now, you and I," echoed Fitz, contemptuously. "It may just as well be settled here, and now, though I have the satisfaction of being able to look forward to another interview, in a larger apartment, and where a more comfortable seat will be at your disposal. The prisoner and the High Sheriff will not need to say much to each other then; though your position there will make no more difference in my valuation of *you*, Neil Athelston, than my position there will make in your valuation of *me*. If you were sheriff of a hundred coun-

ties," he went on, his eyes feverishly hot, while Sir Neil hardly comprehended the keenness of the satire of his last words, "you don't suppose I could look upon you, or on any of your house, with anything but scorn and contempt. *Your* house, mind; I am in no hurry to call it mine. Yet such a fame as mine will be to-morrow, as mine has been now for years, is but a fitting one for the head of such a house."

"I do not understand you," put in Sir Neil, feeling it a trouble to try to do so. "Will you tell me where——"

"*Don't* you understand me?" questioned Fitz, with a slow emphasis. "Well, I will try to make it clear enough for your intellect, if you will kindly assist me by exhibiting some sign upon your face when a gleam of intelligence reaches you. Do you recollect this little sketch? You have seen it before, and I asked you then whether you should recognise the spot if you saw it. Perhaps you never may see it; but *I* shall. In spite of the handcuffs and the dock, I shall have liberty for that. Look at it well; not to criticise it as you did before, when you

bored yourself to death here for an hour, because Miss Chester came—your long pursuit of *her* has been a blacker crime than that which you kindly say will hang me !—but look at it,” he resumed, checking his hot words with a strong and violent effort, “to fix it on your mind. In that church was celebrated, and is registered—*is registered*—the marriage of Sir Gerard Athelston and his first wife ; the wife whose name was the same as the name upon that grave over which she walked—she and her husband, and the clergyman who had married them,—and who lies in her own grave now, suffering no longer from the pain she was made to suffer from one of your noble, upright, truthful race. I shall find that register some day, and then you shall see how well your name and title fit the convict and the murderer. You look astonished ! If you had lived *my* life, none of these trifles would astonish you. Perhaps these sins of mine will be new ones among the Athelstons, but no one then will ever speak of them or think of them. The world smiles just the same upon the Athelstons, innocent or guilty. Their sins are

not the same as the sins of lower men. I dare say—I dare say,” mused Fitz, with the slowest, keenest satire, “that they will elect me High Sheriff then!”

“You are simply insane to talk in this way,” interposed Sir Neil, moved by a hundred feelings at once, and hardly comprehending what they were, except that a hope that this guilty man might be wandering in his mind, battled with a fear in which there seemed a strange truthful strength which he could not define. “You are simply insane to talk so. If your mother imagined——”

“Great Heavens! *you* name my mother to me!” cried Fitz, standing upright now upon the hearth, his broad chest heaving, his eyes literally burning in the torture of their passion, his strong hand clenched and bloodless. “Go away from me! Do you stand there and speak to me of these things on purpose to tempt me? My God! how hard it is to keep my——”

“Mr. Spendir,” said Sir Neil, in almost a pacific tone, for the violence of the artist’s agitation, and the intense effort of the strain he put upon

himself, alarmed as well as astonished him, "tell me where Miss Chester is."

"I don't know," returned Fitz, the words almost a whisper in their forced quietness.

"That is not true," blurted out Sir Neil, in his impatience.

"Isn't it?" questioned Fitz, his clenched hands behind him, and his wide, sunburnt forehead drawn into countless lines. "Then I begin to think you recognise me as an Athelston; father and son, *they* 've been liars for many a generation."

"I think it's more than time the handcuffs were here," said the Baronet, savagely; "and I can leave the finding of Miss Chester to the police; they will manage, I daresay, as they will be obliged to find her in time for her to give her evidence at your trial."

The cruel words had not been planned to stab, but there was a little exultation in the Baronet's mind when he saw that they did so.

"You have pretended to care for her," Fitz said, an awful pallor on his face, as he curbed his passionate temper, and lowered his hot,

fierce tones; "you have seemed to wish to spare her. Now you could spare her this, and will not."

"I wish to see her," returned Neil, moodily; "and if she should tell me——"

"*She* tell you!" ejaculated Fitz, haughtily. "She will tell you nothing about me; and she is not Athelston enough to utter a falsehood. Listen"—the curbed emotion of the man was almost terrible as he came forward a little, and spoke with angry earnestness—"listen: I will wait here, quiet and tame—ay, as quiet and tame as if I were used to it—for my summons to gaol, if you will not seek *her*. You need not fear my escaping; only—only let her escape. In heaven's name spare her this!"

"There's no fear of your escaping, in any case, I think," muttered Sir Neil; "you need not make any unnecessary promises about that. Just tell me where Miss Chester is—that's all I want of you."

"You have deigned to admire Miss Chester," said Fitz, with a slow, bitter smile. "It's a pity, isn't it, that the fate of a murderer should

be entangled with her fate? Lowering, eh, to the Athelston pride and purity?"

"Tell me where she is," struck in Sir Neil, beginning to fear he should win no answer. "I have no wish to be detained longer."

"And I have no wish to detain you," the artist answered, with a slight, haughty bow. "I would quite as soon have one of the Churchill constables; he would manage the thing better."

"I shall not forget those words. By Jove! I shall not!" exclaimed Sir Neil, losing all command over himself. "You shall rue this—you, whose hands are black with crime!"

"Are they?" Fitz said, leisurely examining his strong brown fingers, "are they? Yes, I see they are blacker than yours. But then—let me see—is it the blackness of the *hands* that signifies most?"

"You evidently know where Miss Chester is," put in Sir Neil, going back to his one most serious idea, "and you cannot keep the secret long; I would not advise you to try. All these things will tell against you, you know."

"A thousand things will tell against me," replied Fitz, with bitter coldness; "a hundred memories now will help to drag me to my death."

"But something may be done," interrupted Sir Neil, hoping at last that he might, by soothing means, win the information he wished to obtain. But though the words sounded almost kind, Fitz knew the selfish desire which prompted them.

"Something will be done," he answered, quietly, "and these hundred tongues and memories will help it on. But I cannot die until I find that little church; then I can die an Athelston—the first one whom the law has tenderly taken in hand. Are you growing tired now of your voluntary guard over the criminal?" he added, almost laughing. "I should like to see you take a chair and make yourself comfortable, as befits the High Sheriff. Excuse my not entertaining you, but I wish to finish this illustration before your friends and followers bring me the handcuffs."

To Sir Neil the simple idea of this man's

trying to escape justice seemed absurd, as he watched him seat himself quietly at his work, and immediately become engrossed in it. There was something, under these circumstances, so ludicrous in the idea of his staying there on his fruitless errand, that he walked away from the cottage without another word; and had only reached the gate, when the dog-cart came up, with Mr. Jorden and Colonel Stuart. No wonder that they thought he looked angry, and vexed, and baffled.

CHAPTER XII.

PREPARING FOR ESCAPE.

ALONE in his chill and almost fireless room, Fitz Spendir rose and stood before that sketch of which he and Sir Neil had been talking. Long and sadly he gazed upon it, his firm lips shaking as he did so; then, still standing there in the silence, he covered his eyes, as if the sight of it had grown into pain for him. So Jet, entering the room timidly and gravely as he had never entered it before, found him, nearly half-an-hour afterwards.

"I've been to the Anchorage, dad," the child said, nervously, as he approached him. "I—I didn't think where I was going until I saw; and—and—I think Jack's pony went without us knowing."

Fitz had quickly dropped his hand, and now he looked, with a long and questioning gaze, at the little face below him.

"Laddie," he said, in his rich, gentle tones, "what has frightened you?"

"Nothing," the little white lips stammered, in their horror and their great love.

"What have you seen?" the man continued, gently drawing the boy towards him. "Tell me exactly. Don't shrink away from me. Tell me what you saw. I cannot hurt you, laddie; you are not afraid of *me*?"

The voice which the lad had always known so prompt and bright and jesting, was almost wistful now; and still there came no kiss from the childish lips, and no caresses from the little hands.

"Oh, father!" he cried, piteously, "don't ask me; I can't tell it!"

With a deep, acute pain, Fitz felt how involuntarily the child shrank from him, and felt, too, how little he could wonder at this, or blame him for it.

"Very well, laddie," he said, with quiet sad-

ness, "I will not ask you to tell me what you saw, because, of course, I know; and I know who saw it as well as you. Let us talk of something else, shall we? Let us think of other things—prepare for other things. Run, laddie, and fetch me all the treasures that you have; for we must take them with us."

Without even asking his favourite question, "Why?" the boy went slowly upstairs, returning presently with a small wooden box in his hands.

"Here they are, dad; do you want them?" he asked, holding the box tightly.

"Not to keep," the artist answered; "only to see what you have got—what you have to cherish when we leave behind us——"

He checked himself, with a smile into the child's inquisitive face.

"Now you can hold the box. Keep it safe, and I will make discoveries. All right. Open, Sesame!"

Fitz turned over the trifles gently, one by one, smiling a little sadly to see how valueless they were. Not that he told the child this; on

the contrary, he handled the things with tenderness, and now and then exclaimed, admiringly,

"There's the Jew's-harp; how well I remember buying that! And here's the old baby-rattle; and here's—Ah!"

The cry was slow and full of thought; only that one short word, and Fitz Spendir's eyes were keenly and intently bent on a small piece of gilded jewellery which he held between his fingers—a piece of jewellery, at least, that had been gilded once, but was now in its unmistakable brass under-suit. Breathing quickly, Fitz signed Jet away with the box, and opened the locket.

"I—knew it," he muttered. "I wonder why I felt so certain of it all in a moment. Ah, what a good thing *this* is for my boy! I need not take him now. *He* will have a home. I remember the story so well! I wonder whether I should have remembered every word of it as I do, if anyone else had told it to me? God bless her! I think I never could forget any of her bright, kind, thoughtful words, even if I had

been used to such of late. Jet," he added, aloud, "don't look so astonished, dear lad. Come here and see this. Take it up to the lamp, and describe it to me."

"It is a locket, father," the boy said, in his gentle, practical way, wondering why he must look at it alone there; "I know all about it without looking. There's hair in it on both sides, and names; under one hair there's 'Jesse' written, and under the other there's 'Dorcas.' That's all. And it was mother's, you know, and she told me to keep it. Are you going to do anything to it, dad?"

"No," replied Fitz, gently. "Take it in your own care, laddie. Now let us tell stories to each other, like old times."

"Yes," faltered Jet, without the prompt gladness with which, in those old times, he had always received the idea.

"Shall we make up the fire first?" asked Fitz, rising, and moving towards it with an attempt at his old ease, which failed most pitifully. "What do you think, old fellow? Wouldn't a few sticks brighten it up quickest?"

I'll light you to fetch them, for we've no time to lose."

"Why no time to lose?" inquired Jet, curiously, even suspiciously. "What have we got to do, dad?"

"Many things," laughed Fitz; but the boy, watching him as he lighted the candle in his hand, saw no smile in his eyes. He piled the sticks on the little grate while Jet stood by, open-mouthed.

"Why, dad," he ejaculated at last, when his astonishment found words, "you'll burn enough for a whole week—you'll burn 'em all. We can't light the fire to-morrow."

"No," replied the artist, slowly, his face hidden as the crackling flames leapt about him, "not to-morrow."

"There, dad, leave off," whined Jet, growing fretful because he felt he could not understand things to-night.

"All right, laddie," assented Fitz, taking his own seat in the cheerful firelight. "Come, are you too big to sit on my knee to-night?"

But the boy, ignoring the invitation, drew

another chair up for himself, and took his seat silently and demurely. Fitz Spendir, in his sorrow and heart-loneliness, felt this keenly; but no glance or word told of the pain it gave him. His eyes, warm and pitiful as the boy had ever known them, turned to him as he drew the two chairs close together; his words, genial as the boy had ever known them too, were only these, "Now, laddie, it's my turn first, I suppose. I'm ready. You must listen all the time, because—because I want you to tell the very same story afterwards."

"The same one, dad—why?"

Fitz gently stroked the little face upturned in its surprise. It seemed to-night as if the strong, self-concentrated man longed and craved even for the love and sympathy of the timid, cautious child.

"You will know some time, little one. Never mind any reasons for anything to-night. Forget that favourite word of yours, 'why,' and listen to me, just as you listen to the *Arabian Nights* and *Robinson Crusoe*."

The wood fire crackled and blazed, and faded

and blazed again; and in its fluctuating light they sat, the man's voice low and earnest as he told the little story which the boy was to tell afterwards, and to which he listened so breathlessly.

"That's the end," Fitz said, presently. "Now listen a little longer. Presently—presently," he repeated sadly, for the word had to him the sorrow which belongs to the last time, "you will go in next door and tell this story to Mrs. Cheere; and then stay to see what she thinks of it. But I don't want you to forget a single word of it; so now tell it to me—just as if I were Mrs. Dorcas herself. Now then for the rehearsal."

No question passed the boy's lips. The man's deep, quiet earnestness was infectious, and Jet (his head bent in the firelight, and his thin fingers tight upon the locket) spoke with his gentle, old-fashioned gravity.

"I shall go in and show this to Mrs. Cheere, and I shall say that there was once a little girl who was stolen from her home in Churchill, and from her mother, and she had this upon her neck, and she kept it always till she died. And

she was taken a long way off, and sold to a circus—she thought she was sold, but wasn't sure—and she used to ride and things, and she got very tired of it, and was very unhappy. And so one day she fell down from a high horse and was hurt, and somebody who was a dress-maker took her home and cured her, and she stayed with her and was quite happy till she was grown up; and she always kept the locket, but couldn't ever find her mother or her old home, because she couldn't remember either of them, except like a far-away sort of dream. And so one day a gentleman said he was very fond of her, and made her marry him, and go away from everybody that had loved her, and always been good to her, and taken care of her; and made her live in a house in a lonely part of London, with nobody but him; and soon he got to stay away from her all day, and then he got to stay away all night, and then he got to stay away altogether; and he left her alone and poor, and she had only her little boy (but he didn't know it, 'cos he was only a baby), and

then—and then——How am I to say this, dad?"

"As you like, dear laddie."

"And then," resumed the boy, with still the gravity in his eyes and voice, "somebody who had known her cruel husband, and had known that dressmaker who'd loved her, tried and tried to find her out and help her. But he couldn't have time, because he was sent a long way off for eight years. But when half the time was over he came back and found her out really, just as she was growing more and more dying; and the little boy was with her, and nobody else; and this gentleman stayed and helped her as much as he could, only he was as poor as he could be. And when she was dead he took the little boy with him, and they've lived together ever since. And the locket——"

"Wait, laddie, where is the end? Tell it properly."

"And," the boy said, rising and standing before the artist's chair, "I should say, Mrs. Cheere, the little girl who was stolen was your little girl, and the gentleman who married her, and

was so cruel, was Mr. Jelfrey, and the little boy was me, and the gentleman who was with mother, and knows all about her, and where her grave is—for he chose it—and who has had me with him ever since, is—how shall I call you, father?”

“Not *father* any more, dear lad, I fear,” the artist said, bending his dark face upon the little pale, upraised one, “but just what you think of at the moment. The right word is sure to come then from those tender little lips. I can leave it all to you. Now are you ready to go, and have you the locket?”

“But,” argued Jet, “Mrs. Cheere is out now, dad. She was having tea with the housekeeper at the Anchorage when we were there, and she had met Miss Castillain, and had heard—and she came up to Mrs. Esdaile, and—oh! dad——”

The sobs, which had been withheld all the evening, broke out here unrestrainedly at some sudden recollection:

“And she said, I suppose,” the artist put in, “that she had heard what had happened, and

had been expecting it—and, what else?”

“No; she said,” sobbed the child, “that she heard you say you wouldn’t think it any sin to kill Mr. Jelfrey. She heard it through the wall, and she’d been frightened ever since, she said; and she said——”

“What?”

“That if ever we deserved a deluge it’s now, when such crimes—such crimes, she said, were committed by people that lived under the same roof with innocent people. Oh! dad, I don’t want to go to *her*!”

“But, dear,” the artist said, quite gently, though the thought bitterly forced its way that it should be *she* whose words could condemn him, and that this child should be the one to tell it, “she will be quite different to you when she has heard that story you are going to tell her. She is your grandmother, you know, and she will love you at once, for her ‘little girl’s’ sake, and very soon for your own. Now put supper, laddie—let’s have it together to-night (if there is any) before you go.”

With just the deft quietness which belonged

to him, the child laid the cloth on the round table; but there was nothing to put upon it then but one small cold mutton chop.

"You said this morning that we would call, as we came home, and buy something, dad," the boy said, looking ruefully at his neat but scant preparation.

"Yes, dear; but, strange to say, we're quite at a loss in the morning to know what the evening will bring forth. That's quite enough."

"Then come, please," Jet urged, quietly placing a chair for Fitz.

"I will come and sit down," he said, gently, his dark, sad face brightening involuntarily as Jet, now of his own accord, brought the chairs close up together, "but I've no appetite yet. It's rather early for a grown-up man's supper, isn't it? I hope you're hungry, though, laddie. The pleasantest sight I can have, will be to see you eat this chop. Now, dear. 'For what we are going to receive, O Lord, make us thankful. Amen.'"

"But, dad," argued Jet, opening his eyes and dropping his folded hands, as he wonderingly

looked up into the artist's face, "if you aren't going to receive any supper why do you say 'we?'"

"There may be other things coming to us, laddie, besides supper," Fitz answered. "Never mind that, though. Now here's the crust. You always liked the crust of a loaf, didn't you?"

He watched the boy, who ate slowly and without any relish; and then, when the meal was over, he drew him for a few moments close within his arms, and hid his face upon the little head.

There was an utter silence between them for those few moments—a silence which the boy could only understand completely when, a man himself, he could still distinctly recall this wretched night. Then Fitz opened the back door of Mrs. Cheere's cottage with his own key, for the bolt had not been drawn, and the child went in alone; dressed, as he had been all day, in his best clothes, and holding safely between both hands the little gilded locket. And Fitz watched him to the last minute, his eyes dim; but his lips set firmly as they had not been before since Sir Neil Athelston had left him.

CHAPTER XIII.

FITZ SPENDIR'S JUDGE.

ONE glance the artist gave round his own room —a brief, cynical, comprehensive glance ; then, avoiding touching one single thing which it contained, he unfastened again the door in the back of the cottage, which opened close upon the field-path to the valley ; and this path he traversed in rapid silence, until he came close upon that tarn in the hollow.

Far from shunning or avoiding it, he walked up to the brink, and (in the gloom that was awful as deep darkness) stood gazing along the surface, his eyes still dim, his lips still stern and rigid. Then once more he resumed his rapid flight, and never paused again until he reached a village station some four miles from Churchill.

The rain was falling now continuously, and

Fitz Spendir's coat and hat were soaked ; but he avoided the booking-office and the covered part of the station, and walked slowly to and fro upon the unsheltered platform. How long would it be before the London train came? Would there be time for him to be stopped? Even if the train were punctual, there was still half an hour to wait. He had better have lingered longer, he thought, in that heavy gloom among the hills.

Half an hour! He would walk backwards and forwards just one hundred times—surely that would bring the hour near! He walked as slowly as he could, the beating rain unheeded, and then he glanced through the office-window at the station clock. A quarter of an hour nearer! One hundred times more. Would the pursuing feet have reached him then, and ended it all? Or would the train be in time? The second hundred were finished; and then Fitz, breathing rather hard and fast, but with no attempt at concealing his face, entered the ticket-office, and bought a second-class ticket to London.

"You've just escaped a disappointment, sir," the station-master observed. "It's only since this month began that the train has stopped here; last month you couldn't have gone."

Fitz smiled as he pocketed his ticket.

"I'm lucky, then," he said, coolly; and the man little guessed what meaning the words bore. "Is the train generally pretty punctual?" he inquired.

"Always pretty punctual, sir," was the answer. "There's a goods train to run through first, and then it generally follows as punctual as may be."

"Thanks."

Fitz had now turned to leave the office, but another passenger, muffled up and laden, was entering, and so he had to stand a minute until the doorway was free again. Standing so—still never hiding his face, but looking out clearly on everything about him—his eyes fell upon certain printed words that hung upon the wall, and they rested there upon one line, which seemed to stand alone amid the other lines, clearer, plainer, more distinct :

“HE THAT JUDGEETH ME IS THE LORD.”

Out on the platform once more, standing away from the light, in the drenching rain ; and looking eagerly into the distant darkness for the lamps, these words repeated themselves to Fitz again and again.

At last the glaring red eyes met his watching ones, and an engine dashed up to him—past him ; away into the darkness behind ; and the goods train had left the station clear for the one for which he so breathlessly waited.

“HE THAT JUDGEETH ME IS THE LORD.”

In the very blackness that encircled him, the words shone out ; not in letters of light or of fire, only just as he had seen them, black letters on the white paper ; simple, forcible, truthful, but with no outward reason to make them so, the force, the truth, and the simplicity lying in the words themselves.

Would the train be in time, or would the pursuing footsteps——? Ah, no, not too late, for here it came ; the fiery eyes steadily, swiftly rolling towards him, bringing rescue.

Fitz drew back from the edge of the platform, and moved down again towards the lighted part of the station. It was coming now, close behind him. The whistle had died away in the silence, and the engine's pace was slow and deliberate; yet even now, with escape so close at hand, Fitz saw those words more plainly than aught else:

“HE THAT JUDGEETH ME IS THE LORD.”

Was he whispering them to himself, or could other voices——

“Almost exact to time, you see, sir,” said the porter, opening a carriage door near Fitz, as the train stopped. “All right here, sir. It's wet enough standing where you've been.”

The carriage door stood wide open; the other passenger had taken his seat; the engine was getting up its steam again. Beyond lay inscrutable darkness; and, beyond that, safety in the crowd and labyrinth of London. The pursuing footsteps had not been in time. Escape and rescue were here awaiting him. Why should those words delay him?

The man held the door and waited. Fitz took out a shilling and put it quietly into his hand. He, at any rate, had helped him, and was willing unconsciously to help him until the fear of detection was passed—perhaps for ever. Yet could he fly from judgment if He that judged him was the Lord?

“Quick, sir, please.”

And still Fitz hesitated; haunted by the echo of those words at which this man had gazed all day perhaps, seeing no meaning in them.

“Please be quick, sir; there’s no cause to stop.”

The answer was low and rapid—spoken in an intense and bitter struggle.

“Shut the door; I’m not going.”

* * * * *

The London train whirled away into the blackness of the night landscape. The porter stood at the station gate, his lantern raised to see the last of the would-be passenger, who “must surely be mad to have bought a ticket, and been as if he was going to London, till the

very last moment, and then turn all at once so suddenly."

And the man he judged so, tired and drenched, took his way, in the rain and darkness, back across the hills, to his own deserted home, there to await the death to which he knew he might be doomed.

CHAPTER XIV.

“JUST SUCH AS HE.”

WHEN Fitz Spendir re-entered his cottage, he found the lamp burning, and Colonel Stuart standing beside the fireless grate, evidently awaiting him.

His first sensation was one of extreme pleasure, and his face showed it; but when the words he would have uttered, in this pleasure, rose to his lips, he mistrusted himself, and so the words that passed them had a different meaning and a different tone.

“I expected the police here, Colonel Stuart.”

“Never mind the police, Spendir, for these few minutes. I waited, feeling sure you would return. I have been anxious all the evening to come and speak with you, but I could not leave High Athelston before. They are worried and

anxious about the absence of Miss Chester. Poor Lady Athelston has been in hysterics, and Miss Marjorie Castillain has had much trouble with her. Sir Neil has gone—to seek Miss Chester, as I fear."

Not a word could Fitz Spendir say in reply to this speech, so kindly spoken.

"I wanted to see you," the Colonel added, "that I might tell you how willingly everything in our power will be done for you. You may rest assured of that, Spendir."

Fitz smiled, a smile that might either have been incredulous or hopeless.

"I promise you," the Colonel repeated, earnestly.

"You would not—you *could* not, if you knew," Fitz said.

"I would—I shall, *because* I know," was the prompt, gentle answer.

"How, Colonel Stuart?" inquired the artist, gazing into his face with surprise.

"It would be a long story, if I were to tell you exactly how," returned the Colonel. "Even your sister—though she does not guess it—

could understand and believe it more readily than you will, because she may remember whom her old pupil, Clara Esdaile, married. You were away at the time, so would hardly know that for one brief year she was my wife. Did you never make inquiries about my sister when you heard her name—little Jack's name, too?"

"I knew," Fitz said, in a low, hesitating voice, "I knew that it was Mrs. Esdaile's husband who—who prosecuted for his father five years ago."

"Yes," put in the Colonel, in his quiet, kindly way, "old Mr. Esdaile's only son. He is in Africa now, or he would have recognised you; his wife had never seen you, so, of course, could not do so. But Clara had known you so well, and, above all, loved your sister so very dearly, that she never believed in your guilt. Is it strange, therefore, that I should have grown to believe what my wife believed, until now the belief is, in reality, a *consciousness* of your innocence? She used to talk to me of your sister Magdalen, and, indeed, of you, until I seemed to know you both. Still it was only

gradually that I recognised you. I had a suspicion even at first; then the suspicion dawned into conviction. Even when Miss Chester came with me here, only a day or two after her arrival in Highshire, I began to fancy what also became a certainty to me afterwards. Spendir, have I any need to tell you that this discovery was never breathed to anyone but my own sister, and that to her it had grown to be, even then, more than a suspicion? And believe this; day by day, as our knowledge of you grew, it only became more impossible for us to feel that the verdict uttered against you nearly five years ago could have been a just one; and, day by day, as our knowledge of your sister grew, Clara's judgment of her came to be *our* judgment, and the friendship that we were both willing to give her, for Clara's sake, was won from us for her own. Now, Spendir, you will believe that nothing which we *can* do for you will be left undone."

"You are—you always have been very kind, Colonel Stuart," returned Fitz, his face very

still and thoughtful, as it had been all through the Colonel's speech ; "but—if I understand the fact aright, for even yet it is all vague and unreal to me—it is better for me not to hope ; acquittal will be impossible for me when that former trial of mine is known. But I may hope now for Magdalen ; I shall never feel again, after your generous words, that she is so utterly alone and forsaken. Even if I cannot thank you for your unexampled goodness to myself, I can thank you for that which you have shown to her. But," he added, rather hurriedly, "I cannot let you sit with me to-night, Colonel Stuart, without telling you by what a mere chance you found me here. You waited, you say, confident that I should return ; that confidence, at any rate, I have not deserved, for I—had not intended to be here awaiting my fate."

And then Fitz Spendir, in that low, unhurried tone which grows natural to those who live much alone, told of his escape as far as the village station, of the few words he had read there, and of how strangely and deeply those

words had sunk into his heart, until it grew impossible to him to follow his original design.

Colonel Stuart sat opposite, listening in silence; his eyes full of a deep sympathy, but never once raised to the artist's face.

When the short, sad story was over, he stretched out his hand to Fitz. He was a cool, middle-aged soldier, yet he would not trust himself to speak just then. For an instant Fitz hesitated, looking wistfully at the outstretched hand.

"I cannot resist," he said then, with his low, rich laugh. "It may be the last, as it has been the first, which has sought mine, for—for most of a lifetime, counting as time *ought* to be counted. Colonel Stuart, you are not one to regret that you have taken in yours even the stained hand of a murderer?"

"Hush, Spendir!" put in the Colonel, in real distress; "that word need not be uttered between us. This would never have occurred, if you had known of the old shaft beneath the water."

"No, never; but the deed is done," interposed Fitz. "No ignorance of mine takes from it the horrors of guilt. Possibly at the trial, as you kindly think, they may call it by another name, but it makes no difference to me. I have taken his life—so those who saw us say—that is enough. It is a long thought, and will last me a long time. What else have I to think of, now that my life has stopped? A black curtain has fallen between me and the future; what have I but the past to look at—the near past, and the long past? Though, God knows, there's nothing cheerful there! Guilt there, too—guilt always; and its punishment."

"Not your own guilt," put in the officer, earnestly.

"But what difference has that made?" was the answer, spoken in a passion which was as short-lived as it was strong and ironical. "What difference has that ever made? There followed the punishment, the isolation, the degradation. Could it have been more, if I had done the deed in the sight of man and God? I've often and often since then *wanted* to commit just such a

sin. You look incredulous—in your spotless, unsuspected life, you can no more imagine such feelings than you can imagine the treatment which gives birth to them—yet these vile thoughts have grown horribly familiar to me. I have *wanted* to commit the real sin, because I had borne, and was bearing, its punishment, and because all my life was marred for any good. I knew no worse consequences could have followed the real crime. There were years and years of labour to look forward to, and there was the ban upon my name, which could never be taken away again. Could anything have added punishment to these? My whole prospect of ever living honoured or loved—loved! think of love in such a life as mine!—among my fellow-men, was shattered to atoms. What did it matter where those atoms drifted to? No; *you* can never fancy how easy the real guilt often seemed to me?"

"Yes, I can understand," rejoined the Colonel; "and I can understand the Loving-kindness which withheld your hand through that time. However black a curtain hides the future from

you, Spendir, it cannot hide the Heaven above."

"But I never thought of that—sometimes I did not even believe it," returned Fitz, the passion of his quick tones softening a little. "It is harder still to think of it now. Where is the mercy that——"

"Spendir," interrupted the Colonel, easily and genially turning aside the cynical, unhealthy thoughts which he felt were but natural just now, from this man whose strong sense of justice battled so fiercely with that simple, anxious faith with which he tried to grope through the darkness of his own thoughts, "you have been working hard and saving carefully through this Summer; am I right in my idea of your reason? Are you trying to accumulate that sum which—for which the cheque was drawn in your name?"

"I *was* trying," returned the young man, pushing the hair from his dark face, with a gesture of such utter weariness and hopelessness that the Colonel felt his lips shake as he read in it many unspoken words—"I was trying; but that is over now, like everything else. What a fool I must have been to have

begun such a work with any hope at all. Yet I did. I can laugh now to find how strong and deathless hope must be within a man, for it ever to have misled *me*. I did work for that, late and early, happily and hopefully—ay, laughable as it sounds. No work seemed too hard or too heavy for that end. I have saved; but a thousand pounds takes a long, long time to accumulate by the hands of one man, who has no particular talent, and no friends. If my old means of livelihood had not failed me in my need, the task would have been comparatively easy to me. But, as I told you months ago, my voice failed me for singing in public; what wonder that it did, in that time of degradation?"

"Don't let us speak of that time," said the Colonel, gently. "I hope you understand that not one farthing of that money will either Adelaide or her husband take; and do you for a moment dream that I would take Clara's share from one who never robbed her of a half-penny? Don't speak of that time again. Perhaps it need not be recalled at all. Perhaps no one will know."

“Not know that I am a ticket-of-leave man! Why, that will be the first thing brought forward at my trial, and will damn me instantly. A ticket-of-leave man—a returned convict! Think of it. Say it over to yourself, and imagine the weight of those few words in a court of justice. You should have heard the horror and rage of my neighbour here, when she fancied a ticket-of-leave man came to our doors to ask for a crust, only to-day. A helpless, crippled old idiot he was; but what did that matter? He was capable of anything savage or mean or horrible, because he only *might* be a convict with a ticket-of-leave. He was to be avoided and scouted and spit at, because he only *might* be this horrible thing. Perhaps he was—perhaps he wasn't. What did it matter? The consequences, as far as she went, were all one to him; as the consequences will be all one to me. I didn't care whether he was or not; I'm used to them. I've known them harmless and quiet—actually as if they hadn't done the wrong. I've known them so like men that hadn't been debased, that you wouldn't have discovered them if the irons

had been taken away ; and I've known them fiends incarnate."

"But the story of these old years may be hushed up," put in Colonel Stuart, gently. "We all have a little power in the county ; Sir Neil Athelston has much."

It was because he knew this so well that Fitz Spendir answered, with such quick resentment,

"I don't care to benefit by his unlimited power. *Your* help and sympathy—but," he added, interrupting himself as if the subject hurt him keenly, "why, in heaven's name, should help be sought for me? I did that deed to-night. Even if no one had been present to swear I did it, the stain upon my name would condemn me."

"There will be evidence in your favour, too," put in Colonel Stuart.

"Not to weigh for much, even if *you* win it for me (for who else would?). Not to weigh for much against that other evidence. Why, that of my next-door neighbour alone should hang me. Colonel Stuart," he added, laughing his

short laugh of nervous strength and hopelessness, "is not it easy to love your neighbour as yourself?"

"How would her evidence injure you, Spendir?"

Then Fitz repeated what Jet had heard her tell Mrs. Esdaile while he was at the Anchorage, and vexed indeed did the Colonel look as he listened.

"It would not signify if it stopped there," he muttered, "but she may have repeated the same thing to others. It may have spread all over the town by this time. I would have done anything to prevent this."

"Don't think of it more, Colonel Stuart," said Fitz, with a change to great gentleness in his voice, "and don't even try to help me, for you must see what a failure any effort would be. I am ready for my trial, ready even for the verdict, as heaven knows I could not have been in that other trial. But, oh! if you can help my sister," he added, with intense earnestness, "and *will* do it, I shall be grateful always. If I only knew now that she was safe, every-

thing else would seem almost easy to bear."

"You have no idea where she is, then?"

"Indeed, no. I have not seen her since this morning, when she promised to come here again at dusk. Lady Athelston was out for the day, she said, and her time was her own."

"And she evidently came," said the Colonel; "and, as you were away, she followed you to the valley. From the tarn she was lost sight of. I was glad, Spendir, truly glad, for I had been in real fear lest we should find her at High Athelston. She has acted with the deepest wisdom,—consciously or unconsciously."

"Thank God!" murmured Fitz.

"Don't be anxious about her," continued Colonel Stuart, kindly. "If she does return, you may rely upon my gladly helping and cheering her in every way I have the power to do. Depend on this through all, Spendir."

"She can hardly miss *my* protection," said Fitz, sadly; "what good has it ever been to her? Yet how differently we had planned—and dreamed of—her life and mine!"

"And besides my ready, willing help, always

at her service," the Colonel continued, a little huskily, "you may depend on Miss Castellain's—Miss Marjorie Castellain's. Her deepest sympathy is with your sister—and with you."

"Did she say it?" inquired the young man, his beautiful eyes taking their old warmth, and the dusky colour rising in his cheeks.

"Indeed she did," replied the Colonel, looking away from his companion, and speaking with a new and great pity in his tones. "I will tell you her own words, Spendir—of course I will, for she spoke them for you; I am only her messenger. 'Tell him,' she said, 'that you have offered to tell me his story, but that I will not listen until he says that he *wishes* me to hear it. Tell him that, not knowing one single word of it, I trust him as implicitly as I trust Lina; and as I *shall* trust her all through her absence. Tell him I shall never cease trying to help him as far as my little power goes, and shall hope to be his friend, and his sister's friend, all my life. Tell him I never shall think of him except as I've thought of him all through this Summer, while I've seen him working al-

ways hard and earnestly among us, always brave through ridicule, and uncomplaining through privation. Tell him I shall never rest until I know Lina Chester to be happy and safe; and this because she has, by her own real goodness, won my love, and I cannot take it back ever, or let it lie idle and unhelpful. Tell him all this, while I don't know his story or hers, yet while I trust and respect them both entirely. And tell him I never can think of Eustace Jelfrey except as the wicked man I know him—I, best of all, though he cannot understand that—and that I do not think him dead.' That was her message, Spendir, and I have remembered every word."

Fitz was standing against the chimney-piece, his face hidden, his chest heaving quickly. Without looking up, the Colonel spoke on, following his own thoughts.

"We all know Eustace Jelfrey now too well," he said, "to doubt his power of dissembling; but I think Miss Castillain has cause to know him best, except, of course, yourself and your sister."

"Colonel Stuart," said Fitz, turning slowly, and speaking with intense, suppressed emotion, "will you tell Miss Marjorie our story—Magdalen's and mine—and will you wait and listen to one chapter which I have never spoken of until this evening, when I told it to Sir Neil Athelston?"

Quietly now, the young man related the story which had been told in heat and scorn a few hours before. And the Colonel answered not one word—not one single word—but he just laid his hand on that of the nameless artist, the returned convict, the homicide; and grasped it so closely and tightly that Fitz Spendir knew this meant far more than a good-bye.

The two men walked down the garden together, and parted at the gate. Then Fitz stood there a few minutes; alone in the darkness and the silence, for the storm which had risen three hours before among the hills had lulled. Presently that silence was broken by voices and footsteps. They were coming, then, at last; and Fitz was conscious of a

feeling almost of relief, until there broke upon his ear the raised, cold voice of Dorcas Cheere.

"Yes, that's the cottage; next to mine, more's the shame and pity,"—these were the words he heard—"and it's a good thing that you've come to take him to-night; I should have been frightened enough to be near him through another night and darkness. Goodness knows what he mightn't have done; for a man that can kill one, can kill another."

The young man smiled oddly as he listened; yet the words fell far more heavily upon his ear than did the rough salute of the men whose business it was to take him to his long imprisonment.

"To think I should have lived close to such danger all these months!" muttered Dorcas, lingering to listen, and to enjoy the suggestive clinking of the handcuffs. "It must have been just such as he that took my little girl."

The other words, if there were any, were lost to Fitz as the men led him away; but

these kept repeating themselves again and again to him :

“ Just such as he——”

And as he walked away, slowly and silently in the darkness, Dorcas passed on into her cottage, where the patient child sat waiting to tell her the story of his little life.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SEARCH FOR LINA.

MISS CASTILLAIN lounged before the drawing-room fire at Hawkedale, with the second volume of a new novel in her hand. But though she was highly interested in the fate of the golden-haired and angelic heroine therein portrayed, she went but slowly through the volume; because whenever she heard the sound of the hall bell vibrating through the silent old house, she slipped it under the cushion of the couch, and leaned back, with her white hands lying on the masses of bright wools which were scattered in picturesque confusion on the rich folds of her black silk dress.

No one, except the servants (who most

of them hated her with a pious hatred), ever ventured to assert that Miss Castillain was wearing mourning for Mr. Jelfrey; but certain it is that since Fitz Spendir had been pronounced guilty of manslaughter at the magisterial inquiry at Churchill, she had worn only this one black dress ("though she wouldn't, if it wasn't a handsome and becoming one," as her maid declared with a toss of her head). And, indeed, if abjuring all colours constitutes wearing mourning, Louisa Castillain did mourn for the man whom she delighted to fancy she had loved with an undying love. And beyond the black dress, she wore a sorrowful resignation on her face, a melancholy droop in her light blue eyes, and a graceful inertness in her whole attitude; wore them, at least, to all who called at Hawkedale in those days (and they were many, for the curiosity and sympathy of Highshire had been roused by that scene at the mountain tarn); and of course, no one saw the novel under the sofa pillow, or heard, either, the sharp words in the store-

room, or the gossip in the dressing-room.

But there are few of us who could bear the examination of our skeleton-closet by our morning callers, so we will let Louisa practise with impunity her little harmless fictions.

This time, however, the book was put away unnecessarily, and the effect of the pretty hands among the brilliant skeins was wasted; for when the door opened it was only to admit Marjorie, although the step was so different from the light step which belonged to her, that even Louisa had not recognised it.

"Riding again!" she said, sneering a little as she surreptitiously drew the novel from its hiding-place. "What induces you to ride for ever?"

"What else is there to do?"

Marjorie asked the question with an intense listlessness, as she stood opposite her sister. Her habit (dropped as if her hands were tired of it) lay in thick folds upon the rug, her whip was thrown upon the easy-chair behind her, her hands were locked upon the carved old chimney-piece, and her eyes were fixed upon the fire.

"What else is there to do!" echoed Louisa; "why, plenty of things, I should think, for a girl like you. You have not been to the school for this whole fortnight. Mr. Jorden will be astonished at our neglect, and *I* cannot be expected to—to take an interest in those things again yet."

"No," replied Marjorie, tersely; "don't try. Let it drop."

"But it is not right to let these things drop," put in the elder sister, resignedly. "I never should, under ordinary circumstances."

"I shall be very glad when you feel inclined to do them again, Louie," Marjorie said, almost sadly, "and to take pleasure in them. But please don't ask me. I don't feel it's of any use to do 'these things,' as you say, unless one feels sure they are benefiting either oneself or others. I know I should not benefit any one now; not myself, for I should be chafing sorely all the time I taught; not the children, for I should fail in giving them the easiest lesson of all. I could not even tell them what p-a-t-i-e-n-c-e spells."

"And so you find your time pass more profitably, randomly riding about the country alone, or joining Neil at some dismal place among-the hills? Riding together as you used to do, is a different thing from this."

"Very different," assented Marjorie, without raising her eyes.

"And really," Miss Castillain added, with acrimony, "I wonder you can act as you do, when you know how the Highshire people talk."

"What sort of people?" inquired Marjorie, listlessly.

"And I doubly wonder," continued her sister, unheeding the remark, "how you can persist in it, when you must see what a continual insult to you was Neil's behaviour to Miss Chester while she lived with his mother, and what a double insult now is his assiduity in searching for her himself, setting every tongue busy with your name. As if it were not enough," lamented Louisa, with a dismal relish, "for *me* to be the subject of gossip and pity."

Marjorie's lips curled a little, but still her eyes were not lifted.

"Why don't you take off your habit before you come in here?" inquired Louisa. "Are you going to do so at all?"

"Presently. Louie, has Colonel Stuart been here to-day?"

"No; why?"

"Because he said he hoped to come. If I thought he had been prevented," mused Marjorie, "I would ride on to the Anchorage before I take off my habit."

"Well, I'm sure," ejaculated Louisa, "I wouldn't ride after *him* as well as after Neil, if I were you, Marjorie; you do nothing else all day."

"One thing more," said Marjorie, "I count the days as they crawl on, and long most vainly for the months to fly till they bring March."

"And may I ask why?" drawled Louisa, scornfully, though she knew perfectly well.

"Yes, you may ask if you like," returned Marjorie, simply, "but, as you know, I shall not answer."

"Polite; but I would advise you not to let

everybody see how interested you are in that man's trial."

"December, January, February, March—nearly four months," counted Marjorie. "I tell them over to myself so often, that they seem to grow more instead of less."

"I, too, wish the trial were over," put in Louisa, with a long-drawn sigh. "It will be a very trying scene for me; very trying indeed."

Marjorie glanced long and questioningly at her sister as these words were uttered; but, when she read the vindictiveness which dictated them, the listless quietness on her face vanished suddenly.

"If that busy, restless, selfish Neil finds—finds Miss Chester before the trial," she said, her clear young voice full of passionate anger, "I will—I will——"

"Will what?" sneered the sister. "Will never speak to him again, were you going to say? Suppose he does not value that threat quite so much as you may fancy?"

"Be quiet!" cried Marjorie, with a quick

stamp of her foot. "Even Neil, in this cruel, selfish pursuit of his, is not so contemptible as you are. He *wants* to be kind to her, only he does not know the wisest way, and loves himself much better than he loves her. But you—you think of no one but yourself, no one; and all *your* grief is only cruelty dressed in hypocritical mourning. There, I knew I should not be able to help saying it some day soon—and now it is said."

"Have you quite finished?" questioned Louisa, with slow scorn in her tone, and raising her light eyebrows languidly. "Your vulgarity, with all your care, still peeps out at times, and I am getting hopeless of ever seeing you different."

"Will you never think my words are real and earnest?" panted the younger girl. "You always treat me as if I were a baby or an idiot. If I am vexed, you enjoy my vexation; if I am glad, you sneer at my happiness; if I am sad, you laugh at my silence. Oh! I am so tired of it!"

The cry rushed up from an overburdened

heart, and though Louisa's ears—dull and selfish ever—distinguished none of its yearning pathos, she uttered her next words a little more gently.

"It is most strange to see Neil eager in this chase; he is so lazy always, so afraid of exertion, so indifferent to other people's troubles."

"I watch him in astonishment," said Marjorie, presently, too thoroughly engrossed with other thoughts to resent anything her sister had said—"an astonishment that now and then borders on admiration, for, under all his lazy indifference, there actually seems to throb a real passionate power and earnestness."

"I'm sorry it is there, if it is to be directed so," said Louisa, with a provoking leisureliness.

A quick look Marjorie gave into the sharp, fair face.

"I am very sorry it is directed *so*," she said, truthfully; "but I don't suppose our reasons are quite the same."

"Of course," ruminated Miss Castillain, complacently, "the girl is sure to be found before

the Assizes. Still her evidence, though it would be satisfactory to have it, is not necessary. We three are quite enough to have seen poor Eustace murdered."

"Don't cry, Louisa," remarked her sister, drily, seeing Louisa putting her handkerchief to her eyes at the mention of Mr. Jelfrey by his Christian name (a luxury of speech which she had adopted with her black dress). "You needn't cry; I don't suppose he is dead at all."

"Marjorie!" exclaimed Miss Castellain, as she had many times before exclaimed at this coolly-pronounced idea, "how can you hurt and insult me as you do? Do you suppose that I was blind or mad that evening?"

"I don't say he did not fall into the pool," put in Marjorie, gently; "only I say I believe he is not dead."

"You only insist on it to aggravate me," whined Louisa; "and you didn't let me finish what I was going to say. Do you suppose that, if he were alive, he would not be here?—that he would not have come to me?"

"I cannot tell," replied the younger girl,

with a gleam of her old humour, "because I never did and never shall understand any one of his inscrutable designs. Did *you* ever quite understand him?"

The scarlet mounted to the very roots of Miss Castillain's fair frizzled hair as she met her sister's eyes—the eyes that were so brightly honest in their questioning—and she answered as she would not have done if she had been at her ease,

"It is not many girls who would side with the murderer of their sister's lover."

"It is astonishing," said Marjorie, quietly turning aside the remark, "to see how greatly Lady Athelston misses Miss Chester."

"Perhaps it is for his mother's sake then that Neil is so indefatigable in his search," proposed Louisa, spitefully.

"Perhaps so; and it is just as astonishing to see how Colonel Stuart takes this affair to heart. He has been to the gaol—he has been to see Mr. Spendir again and again, and he tries——Louie," she added, checking herself with a sudden tightening of her lips, "you heard that

strange story which Neil told us the other night about Mr. Spendir calling himself an Athelston?"

"Ridiculous!" snapped Miss Castillain; "yes, I heard, of course, and I didn't wonder at his laughing over it as such an absurdity. I only wonder at the man's volunteering to cast a slur on his own birth just now, and at Neil's condescending to repeat such rubbish, even to us."

"I think," said Marjorie, thoughtfully, "that Neil told us as a piece of diplomacy for which I should hardly have given him credit. He fancied Mr. Spendir would tell it all to the magistrates, and he wished us to hear his own ironical version of it first; that we might be prepared to look upon it only as absurd and idiotic, and a sign of Mr. Spendir's crowning degradation—as he represented it."

"Absurd and idiotic and degrading indeed, I should think so!" was the prompt reply. "And I believe Colonel Stuart has heard it too. Why, I should think this man did it to prepare the way for a plea of insanity in his defence. He is

cunning enough to have invented it for that purpose."

"Of course it will be looked into," mused Marjorie.

"Looked into! Surely no one would condescend to look into anything so preposterous."

"Suppose it turns out that he is the real baronet," Marjorie went on, with a great thoughtfulness in her voice, and a dancing light in her eyes; "what a contrast to the present one—or, I ought to say, in that case, what a contrast to the presumptive one!"

"Rather a contrast to the real one, indeed," sneered Miss Castillain. "You would hardly have jumped so readily then at the prospect of being Lady Athelston?"

"Did I jump at the prospect of being Lady Athelston?" questioned Marjorie, very slowly; "then I am sure I should have leaped—What a sneer, Louie! I really dare not finish my sentence."

"What makes you think Colonel Stuart is coming here this afternoon?" asked Louisa, beginning to think it would be safest to put her book away for good.

"Because he told me, this morning at the post-office, that he wished to see papa."

"And did you ask him to call?"

"No. I only said I had not believed before that any one ever really wished to see papa."

"Oh! Marjorie, how disgusted he must have been!" cried the elder sister, with pious horror; yet rather enjoying the thought, and the sight of the heightened colour in Marjorie's cheeks.

"He *was* very much disgusted," assented Marjorie, without reluctance; "he would have been more scornful to me than usual, only for the fact of its impossibility."

"Even Neil says you have no filial piety," mourned Miss Castillain, regretfully.

"Some day I will study the part from you," was the slow reply; "but, Louie, don't let us speak of——The words I came in on purpose to say, I have not said yet. I seem as if I were always saying them," she added, sadly, "and always deciding never to say them again; yet——yet here I am to plead once more my old request."

"You need not repeat it," struck in Louisa,

coldly ; "I know what you mean, and it will be as useless to say it now as it has always been. It is only an insult to me for you to be perpetually telling me what you wish my conduct to be towards that wicked man and his sister—if she really be his sister. I will not go on listening to you ; I will not, so you need not try."

Louisa's voice rose shrilly in her excitement.

"I will not try, then," answered Marjorie, the words almost rushing from her hot, quivering lips ; "I have said again and again that I will not, and yet I always break my word."

"Yes, you do," concurred Louisa, her handkerchief once more applied to her dry eyes, "and I never shall have any peace until that trial is over, and the man is transported for life, and the girl disgraced for ever."

"Oh, Louie, hush !—hush !—have a little pity !"

The quick, pained cry just faintly reached the ears of Colonel Stuart as he passed unobserved by the drawing-room windows, and made him, almost unconsciously, hesitate at the door before ringing. And while he waited, Marjorie broke her

word again, and pleaded yet once more for the solitary man in the county gaol, whose life and liberty seemed to her to be in her sister's power; and then for the lonely girl to whom it would be worse than death to be brought back to the only home she knew.

But again, as it had been day after day, the prayer was unheeded, the request coldly denied; and once more the younger girl's great earnestness—always a hopeful earnestness—slowly died.

“Bless me!” exclaimed Louisa at last, as she rose and shook out the rich, crisp plaits of her tunic, “do leave off these theatrical scenes. You would, if you could see how unbecoming they are. Let those people alone. What have you to do with them, or they with you—low impostors as they are? If I did not feel really lowered by your conduct, I could laugh at it; but I cannot even laugh, to see you making yourself so ridiculous for a man who has been committed for murder, and who cannot hope to be found guilty of less, whatever people may say about the defence being reserved. Bah! I

should like to know where they are to find a defence, though Colonel Stuart, I do verily believe——”

But Louisa stopped at last. What was the use of finishing her tirade without an audience?

Marjorie had risen slowly from her coaxing attitude, and left the room. The shafts had sped after her from Louisa's tongue, but it would be useless to hurl another now, for the door had closed quietly behind the younger sister, and the elder one was left alone with her spleen, feeling uncomfortably mortified, as we do when “left behind,” even in a quarrel.

Crossing the hall, with her cheeks and eyes aflame, Marjorie became suddenly aware that Colonel Stuart was entering it. He put down his hat, and advanced to her with the easy, quiet at-homeness which characterized him. “Miss Marjorie,” he said, retaining her hand only for an instant, and not seeming to see the emotion in her face, “I hear your father is out at present. May I wait for him?”

Not a direct question, beyond that obvious fact of his waiting, yet Marjorie knew instinct-

ively that he wished to speak to her before her father's arrival, and that he had timed his visit for that purpose.

She led him in silence to that sombre and ugly room where Mr. Castillain's business interviews were always held, and, closing the door upon them, waited for him to speak.

"Sir Neil Athelston has gone to London this afternoon, Miss Marjorie," he said, as he put her a chair beside the smouldering fire. "He has, as I suspected, obtained a clue to Miss Chester's whereabouts, and is following it up now."

Marjorie knew that the Colonel's eyes were not fixed in curiosity upon her face; she knew him far too well to imagine it; yet she could not help the slow, rich colour gathering there, as she turned to him astonished and grieved.

"Oh! Colonel Stuart, how very, very sorry I am! We have tried so hard to prevent this, and now for us to have so utterly failed! How is it?"

"Do not say utterly failed yet, as even this clue may be unavailing. But Athelston's chance was always much better than ours, as I told

you. He had professional aid acting secretly for him; we could not call in professional aid to conceal her, could we? It would have been as good as an acknowledgment of guilt or fear on her part."

"Yes, you told me that before," replied Marjorie, as if unwillingly; "but I always thought that the chance would be greater on the side of right and compassion than on that of wrong and selfishness."

"I fancy it will be so when we can look back and see the whole way clearly," he answered, gently; "now we can only grope a few steps at a time; not seeing the winning or the losing side, only trusting."

"When a thing is disappointing," Marjorie said, "I always ask insanely why it is so. No, of course we could not get professional aid to keep Miss Chester away, or to upset Neil on his way to the station; so we shall have to fold our hands and look on, while the poor girl's heart breaks in that miserable court. Colonel Stuart," she added, with a quick, impetuous change in her voice, "can Neil—even Neil—ever be so really cruel as to bring her here?"

"He would not think it cruel," said the Colonel, while he pondered the emphasized word in her speech. "He thinks it cruel to leave her alone, as he presumes her to be. You cannot blame him for the cruelty which *you* see in this act, because he sees it so differently."

"I don't think he sees it at all," returned the girl, with quick contempt; "he only sees how disagreeable it is to be foiled for the first time in his life, and how much pleasanter it was for him to have Miss Chester about his house. Surely he will never take her there, where we can see the poor girl's misery, without being able to help her or to share it? I promised to do what I could for her, and *that* is what we are doing."

"This is not your doing," put in the Colonel, gently, noticing how the girl's hot fingers were clasped together in her earnestness. "I hope Athelston will bring her to the Anchorage, if he brings her back at all. Adelaide will be glad to have her."

"Oh! Colonel Stuart," whispered Marjorie, "I wish the clue had been given to you instead of to Neil."

He smiled, but his eyes filled with a great gladness at her words.

"I wish so, too," he said; "but let us feel sure that he will use his information kindly at last."

Marjorie's lip curled.

"I cannot feel sure—I cannot fancy it. I have as little faith in that as in Louie's forbearance at the trial."

"Is she not more lenient yet?"

"Less so—less and less so every day. Oh! if I could but——"

The words ceased suddenly, but Colonel Stuart knew what was the prayer she urged so often and so vainly with her sister.

"I think that is papa," she cried, suddenly starting up. "Colonel Stuart, has your wish to see him anything to do with—with what we have been talking about?"

He laughed his negative; partly in the very heartiness of his contradiction, partly to bring a smile to her face, before she should encounter her father's keen and suspicious glance.

Slowly Marjorie mounted the dark old oaken

staircase, as the twilight shadows settled in the corners, and spread gloomily from step to step. Her close, dark habit, unrelieved by any colour, was like one of the embodied shadows clinging about her; yet her beautiful eyes were soft and wistful, and her lips were quivering like a child's.

An hour afterwards, she descended the scantily lighted staircase, in a softly-flowing Cashmere dress of delicate blue, and with a tender Winter rose in her brown hair; yet now her face was still and grave, her lips firmly and almost scornfully set, and her step slow and listless. What need to hasten when there was a whole long evening to spend alone with Louisa?

But an unexpected greeting awaited her when she entered the drawing-room.

"Marjorie," her sister exclaimed, turning sharply to her, "why did not you tell me Colonel Stuart was coming to dinner?"

"I didn't know," said Marjorie, coldly, "I didn't like to ask him whether he should stay if papa invited him; and, if I had, I should still have thought it extremely unlikely that papa *would* invite him."

"I had no idea of it when I ordered dinner, and I'm as vexed as I can be," chafed Miss Castillain, taking out and re-arranging the jet butterfly in her hair, as she stood before the mirror. "I'm always being treated in this unfair way."

"Are you quite sure Colonel Stuart is staying to dine here?" inquired the younger sister, in a voice that was slow and quiet in its scorn. "I should have considered it so very unlikely."

"Don't be a hypocrite," was the retort. "He must have told you."

"If he had told me," said Marjorie, quietly, as she stood with her back to the table, watching her sister's manoeuvres at the glass, "I should have begged him not to come."

"I shall believe that when I hear you do it."

"I should have begged him not to come," repeated the girl, unmoved. "I should have said, 'Why should you come, Colonel Stuart, when you have such a pleasant home of your own? Why should you come here? There's nothing

but a gloomy dinner, of feeble soup and our own everlasting mutton. My father will only entertain you with his experience in keeping twice as many sheep as anyone else on half as much land ; Louisa will only pretend to cry, and look as lugubrious as a clown off the stage ; and I shall only snap at everybody and everything, and fail to get much flavour to my life even out of that. Why, in the name of all that's jocund, should you come?' I should have said that, if I had had the faintest idea that he was insane enough to think of it. I shall never again give Colonel Stuart credit for any wisdom at all."

With a pleased laugh, that was not at all beautifying to the fair, classical face, Louisa turned suddenly from the mirror.

"Oh, Marjorie!" she cried, with a little affected shriek and clasp of her hands, "look who is here! Oh, Colonel Stuart, we did not hear you. I hope you did not overhear my sister's speech? She couldn't help it; she thought she was alone. Did you overhear it?"

"Yes," he answered, looking across into Mar-

jorie's vexed eyes. "I heard. Miss Marjorie, why did you ever give me credit for any wisdom at all, and how have I forfeited that credit now?"

"Of course I gave you credit for it," she answered calmly, though her heart was beating heavily in her vexation; "because I felt it must be wisdom which dictated your perpetual lectures to me; and you have forfeited that credit now by stopping to dine with us."

"And why?"

"Because we are such a—horrid family."

The words darted out brokenly, but still she kept her calm, defiant attitude and expression.

"Marjorie is provoked to-night, and—and perhaps not very well, Colonel Stuart," put in Louisa, apologetically. "Please don't be hurt by her words; we are always glad to receive you at Hawkedale. You believe this, don't you?"

"No," answered the Colonel, slowly, while a laugh gathered in his eyes; "I do not believe your sister is glad to receive me now. It makes no difference, though; I am just as glad to be received."

"Marjorie, you didn't mean that, did you?" pleaded her sister coaxingly.

"I meant exactly what I said, Colonel Stuart," returned Marjorie, her eyes wonderfully bright, in the defiance which struggled with their unusual shyness. "I meant that I *had* thought you wiser than most of us; but when you come here voluntarily to hear our bickerings, and see our tempers, and eat our wearisome mutton, and learn how to feed it cheaply, I lose the idea entirely, and pity your ignorance."

The smile that puckered her lips was irresistible, and Colonel Stuart laughed with heartiness.

"There is dinner," put in Miss Castillain, a little discomfited; "and here is papa. Colonel Stuart, will you come?"

But before he gave her his arm he spoke an instant to Marjorie, the laughter still in his voice.

"I like the mutton, Miss Marjorie, and I like being taught to do things without going to unnecessary expense; and besides that, I have not told you" (the voice was lowered here, and

only she could catch it) "all about Athelston's journey."

"What's that? Is Stuart up to a joke—eh?" questioned Mr. Castillain, with his keen, abrupt chuckle, as he let his younger daughter lay her unwilling hand upon his seedy coat sleeve.

"I believe he must have been, papa; or he is very hungry," she answered, demurely; "for he was proposing *revenir à nos moutons*."

Miss Castillain's polite little speech was broken into by her cavalier's stifled laugh as he caught Marjorie's double meaning.

Not one chance fell to Marjorie, all that night, of hearing what Colonel Stuart had to tell her about Neil's new search, and in real despair she went into the hall at last, just before she said good night. But Louisa came out with him, and destroyed that last chance too.

"Oh, I forgot one thing, Miss Marjorie," he remarked, turning back from the door, as if with a sudden remembrance, "Mrs. Cheere wants to see you."

"Thank you," she answered, so eagerly that she hastened to speak further when she detect-

ed the gratitude in her own voice, "I will go to-morrow, Colonel Stuart. Thank you for bringing me the message. I shall be out at noon to-morrow, and I will go to the cottage then."

He said "Thank you" too, almost as if unconsciously. And then he was gone.

"A nice agreeable temper you have been in all the evening," said Louisa, as the girls entered the drawing-room again. "You would not say a good word of Neil once, though you saw papa getting angry about it. I'm sure Colonel Stuart thought you most flippant, and he is sure to tell Neil."

"Never! *He* is honourable, whatever I may be. Now, papa, do you feel inclined for a dose of cribbage?"

And so the girl, tired and sad, sat down to the game she knew her father enjoyed, and let her sister's speeches pass unresented and unnoticed; the unselfish nature conquering, as it generally did, and fighting its triumphant way through the hasty impulses and warm, impetuous anger which belonged to her.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

